Living with Bipolar Disorder? Here's Your Guide to Staying Motivated

by BETHANY HEINESH

Motivation and Bipolar Disorder

Getting motivated often feels completely impossible when you have bipolar disorder, but the truth is, it can be done.

Here are five tips to help you learn how to successfully motivate yourself when living with this illness, and how to balance motivation and bipolar disorder in everyday life:

#1. Recognize That You Have an Illness, But It Is Not Your Identity

I live with bipolar disorder. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I have bipolar. These are examples of how I explain my illness to "normies" who have little or no experience about what it means to have a mental illness. I NEVER say, "I am bipolar."

Many people with bipolar say this. I used to be one of those people, but I no longer make that mistake. People do not say "I am cancer." They say they have cancer. This is a very important distinction.

You are not your illness. You have an illness — one that can be properly treated and managed. It is not who you are. It is what you have.

Understanding this can make all the difference between getting motivated and lying in bed all day in defeat. You are so much more than this illness. Owning that is a very important step toward wellness. It takes the power away from your diagnosis and puts you back in the driver's seat of your own life.

#2. Acknowledge Your Feelings and Do It Anyway

Those of us who have bipolar disorder are deeply feeling people. We feel excitement and euphoria very deeply, just as we fully experience the lows of depression. Finding and living in the sweet spot between the two is the ultimate goal of our ongoing recovery.

Regarding motivation and bipolar disorder, managing feelings is very difficult for us. If we are not careful, it can be the driving force behind every thought, decision or action. We simply must find a way to feel our feelings and be productive anyway.

There is nothing wrong with having feelings of sadness and depression; it is a reality for people like us. However, we cannot afford to allow what I like to call "bummer emotions" to dictate our day.

It might take everything you have on a given day to motivate yourself to be productive, but you CAN do it. This is not to say that you have to snap out of your depression — which we all know is impossible. It means you can be depressed and participate in life anyway.

It means saying to yourself, “okay, I am depressed, but so what? That doesn’t change the fact that I need to do these dishes”. Cry if you must, but get those dishes done. You will immediately feel better once you have finished.

#3. Motivation and Bipolar: Just Do One Thing

Speaking of doing the dishes and other dreadful tasks we are faced with as grownups, I want to share something that works for me.

I can really let things get out of hand when I am experiencing depression. My entire body hurts, I feel drugged and it feels like I am always walking through wet cement. I don’t want to do anything but sitting in my own mess just makes me feel worse.

Sure, there is so much to do and it feels overwhelming. Yet, I have recognized that sitting on the couch staring into space just gives my brain permission to be mean. “Look at you. You can’t even clean up your own house. You are pathetic!” Can anyone relate?

It has taken practice and consistency, but I have found that if I tell myself, “Just do one thing”, amazing things happen. So, let’s say the dishes need to be done, I need to vacuum and the laundry is piling up. In the past, I would look at all of that and say, “it’s too much! I can’t do it all! Back to bed I go!”

Now, I look at all of that and say, “Just do one thing”. Sometimes it is, “just wash one dish”. I can absolutely handle that! So I set out to do just one thing. What happens is that I will do that one thing and it will feel good. So, my mind will shift. “Okay, awesome, you did it! Now, let’s do one more thing!”

Try it! It really does work!

#4. Motivation and Bipolar: Keep Your Stress Levels in Check

As people living with bipolar disorder, we are very susceptible to stress. It affects us much more profoundly than normies. It can throw us into a complete tailspin, which can have us headed back to the bed to hide under the covers in no time. Or, we can spiral out and get manic, which can be equally destructive.

By practicing stress management techniques in our everyday lives, we greatly reduce our chances of becoming manic or depressed.

We all know how depression can zap us of all motivation to the point that we won’t even shower for weeks at a time. On the flip side, we often tell ourselves that we are super motivated when we are manic. I know I am guilty of convincing myself that all I need is a good a dose of mania to get myself pumped up. But, the reality is that we are completely scattered and unfruitful when we are in this state of mind.

Find a way to keep your stress level in check to avoid crazy mood swings. Take a brisk 15 minute walk every morning, set aside time to meditate every day and stay away from toxic people who bring nothing but drama. If you are in a job that stresses you to the max, consider a career move. Your health has to come first; adjust your life accordingly.

#5. Celebrate Every Victory

So many of us set goals for ourselves and get motivated about achieving those goals. The problem is, we can get laser-focused on the finish line and completely overlook every step involved in getting there. This is a set up for a letdown. There is victory in every single move you make in the right direction; these victories should be celebrated. For example, you might set a goal to lose 50 pounds. You stick with it and lose 10. Instead of thinking, “OMG….. 40 more pounds!? I will never get there!” Tell yourself, “hell yes! I have lost 10 whole pounds. Yay, me!”

There have been times in my life where all I could do was shuffle from the bed to the couch. On those days, getting out of bed was the victory. Once I changed the way I looked at things, I started feeling better about myself and the depression began lifting.

When you acknowledge every victory, especially those that seem insignificant, you completely change your whole frame of mind. Instead of beating yourself up for something you can’t do, celebrate what you can do.

Get Motivated!

Remember, you are NOT bipolar. Having motivation and bipolar is possible. You can feel your feelings but tackle life anyway. You can just do one thing. When you keep your stress levels in check, you are much less likely to have a manic or depressive episode, which can make you more motivated and productive. Also, don’t forget to de-stress. Create a life that is manageable so you can stay in a good mental space.

There you have it, motivation and bipolar disorder, made simple. You've got this!