The Changes in Libido With Bipolar Disorder

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Bipolar and Sex

Sex is a part of life. A healthy sexual relationship between two consenting adults can add to strong feelings of intimacy and increase the quality of the connection. Most long-term, successful relationships are marked by healthy sexual relationships.

People with a healthy sex life tend to be mentally and physically healthier than others. Sex is good for you. Here's why:

- **Sex improves your immune system.** People that have sex at least once a week have higher levels of antibodies, which are useful in protecting your body against illnesses.
- **Sex improves a woman's bladder control.** During sex, muscles are being used to in your pelvic floor. The stronger the muscles, the better your control.
- **Sex improves pain.** Studies have found that orgasms can reduce perception of pain through release of a hormone.
- **Sex is exercise.** Your heart beats faster and you need to breathe deeper to supply oxygen to the muscles doing work.
- **Sex improves your cardiovascular health.** People that have sex regularly are less likely to have heart attacks. This is probably due to the exercise component as well as being a great way to balance estrogen and testosterone.
- **Sex improves sleep and limits stress.** After sex, prolactin is released into your body. This hormone helps you feel relaxed, calm and comfortable.

When sex is good, it produces all of the above results and more. When sex is bad, it can be very problematic for you and those around you. Sex and bipolar disorder constantly work to coexist. Your sex life and sexual functioning is influenced more by bipolar than with other types of mental health issues.

Bipolar disorder is comprised of periods of depression, periods of mania or hypomania and periods of normal functioning. With the shifting of symptoms, your sexual health changes. This creates havoc for your health, your relationships and the others around you. By gaining information regarding the role of sex and bipolar disorder, you will be better able to identify your state and take action to lessen the negative impact.

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Sex During Mania

Mania is a period lasting a week where you will feel in an elated mood, have increased energy, less need for sleep and will be more likely to make poor choices. Hypomania only needs to last for four days and represents the same symptoms to a lesser degree.

Bipolar disorder is one the of the few mental health disorders that actually discusses sex in the criteria for diagnosis. This is because, when manic, people tend to be more interested in goal-directed behaviors, including sex. You will be more interested in having sex, having sex multiple times per day and having sex with people that you may not have sex with otherwise. This is called hypersexuality or being hypersexual.

You may be asking yourself, “What’s so bad about that?” Remember, impulsivity is a cornerstone of mania so birth control is often disregarded. The truth is that people are less cautious in regards to sex are more likely to contract a sexually transmitted disease or have a relationship that ends with an unplanned pregnancy. Additionally, the increase drive for sex can disrupt long-term relationships as infidelity is common.

The risks of sex during mania must be managed to lessen further issues. Here’s how:

- **Monitor.** Self-monitoring means that you pay attention to yourself and your reactions to the world around you. If you wish to limit the negative influence of sex in your life, you must first notice it. Along the way, be sure to track your symptoms. If you note increased manic symptoms, you can prepare. Keep in mind that your monitoring will likely diminish as mania increases. Because of this, you may benefit from recruiting a trusted friend to monitor your symptoms and behaviors as well.

- **Identify triggers.** What increases your compulsion to have sex? Is it drinking alcohol, going to a strip club or watching provocative material at home that boosts your desire to have sex? Or maybe it is something completely counterintuitive and unexpected. Again, attention and memory can be impaired during mania so take notes and rely on information from others.
- **Gain separation.** Now that you have identified your triggers, avoid them. During mania, sex behaves much like an addictive behavior. If you were trying to stop drinking, would you go to the bar? If you were trying to stop spending money, would you head to the mall with your full arsenal of credit cards? Hopefully not. Avoiding the triggers helps keep you safe until the period of mania subsides.
- **Manage urges.** Improving symptoms looks differently for different people. Some people may need to abstain from sex because the history of negative repercussions is simply too great. Others may find success with controlled moderation. Finding sexual release through intercourse with a consenting partner or through masturbation may reduce your symptoms while preventing you from engaging in riskier choices. This will take experience and experimentation to find the process that works best for you and those in your life.
- **Address emotions.** This is an appropriate skill to pursue when symptoms are lower. Why is hypersexuality the way your mania presents? Working with a therapist to uncover and understand your motivations in relationship to your past may limit future symptoms. Not everyone that experiences hypersexuality in mania will have some type of unwanted sexual past, but if you do, addressing it with a professional will be valuable.

Next page: sex during depression.

Sex During Depression

On the other side of the coin is sex during depression. Unsurprisingly, as much as mania is associated with hypersexuality, depression is associated with hyposexuality. Rather than being a case of too much sexual interest and desire, there is diminished interest in and motivation for sex during periods of depression.

Unfortunately, in this case, the opposite of a bad thing is not a good thing. Hyposexuality carries its own set of problems and frustrations. Do you want to lessen the impact of hyposexuality triggered by depression? Here’s how:

- **Talk about it with your psychiatrist.** If you have bipolar, chances are good your see a psychiatrist or another person authorized to prescribe drugs. Have a discussion with them about your medication. Many drugs have sexual side effects including not being able to achieve an erection for men and not being able to accomplish an orgasm for women and men. Perhaps, there are other medications that can be tried

without the risk of this side effect. Some people feel more depressed by their lack of sexual performance.

- **Talk about it with your therapist.** As discussed previously, communicating your sexual concerns to your therapist may lead to a better understanding of the triggers and situations. A therapist may be able to offer insight and suggestions tailored for you that you have never considered.
- **Talk about it with your partner.** Having a decreased interest in sex is more frustrating when in a relationship. Your partner may begin to question the status of the relationship and jump to negative conclusions. Be sure to communicate what you are going through and what they can do to help.
- **Accept or experiment.** This involves making a decision. Are you okay with lowered interest in sex or would you like to change it? If you choose the latter, establish a system of intimacy with your partner. Schedule time daily to be together, hold hands, hug, kiss and snuggle on a couch or in bed. The physical touch and closeness will aid in the transition. Also, consider practicing more sexual contact. You may not have much interest at first, but afterwards, you will be glad you did.

Considerations for Partners

If your partner has bipolar disorder and experiences changing levels of sexuality, consider establishing rules and consequences for their behaviors. What types of behavior will your tolerate? What types are unacceptable? What happens if the line is crossed? Too often, partners will shift between being too tolerant and too strict with their partner. Changing rules are hard to follow, especially when dealing with bipolar disorder.

During the process, take care of yourself. Having a sexually promiscuous partner can contribute to ill feelings and lower self-esteem. You must not succumb to your partner just because you are married or in a relationship. At no point do you need to be with someone that hurts you physically or emotionally. Keeping yourself happy and safe should always be your priority.

Conclusion

Bipolar and sex have an intimate relationship. Like other issues with bipolar, you need to comprehend both extremes of the situation. Understanding your status, triggers and tendencies give your priceless information before you can act to change or end your sexual activities. With hard work, awareness and communication, balance is a possibility.