Recognizing the Early Warning Signs of a Manic Episode

by BECKY WICKS

Mania Warning Signs You Need to Be Aware Of

Mania is a core component of bipolar disorder and can be a damaging and emotionally difficult experience to go through. It is important to understand how to recognize a manic episode in the early stages in order to limit negative impact, and have the best possible prognosis.

There are two kinds of mania within bipolar disorder – hypomanic and manic. A hypomanic episode is considered to be a lesser form of mania, and while it is still not an ideal experience it is much more manageable, especially if caught early.

A full manic episode is extremely disruptive and destructive, and may cause significant damage to your life.

Hypomania Warning Signs

Early warning signs of a hypomanic episode may include (but are not limited to):

- A decreased need for sleep – a few hours or less may suffice and leave you feeling rested.
- An increased level of energy which may also leave you fidgeting, even though your hours spent asleep may have become more sporadic.
- You may find yourself much more sociable and outgoing, and being more open with people.
- You may become irritable or impatient, as it seems those around you are going much slower than you are.
- Concentration levels – you may find it is harder to concentrate and you are distracted by rapid or racing thoughts.
- Your self-esteem and opinion of yourself might greatly improve, and you may have increased self-importance, and ideas about what you might be capable of.
- Your overall mood may become more elevated, and you may feel as if you could take on the world.
- Overspending may become an issue, especially on impulse purchases that you would not normally make.
- Your sex drive may become greatly improved, and you may seek out riskier sexual behaviors such as one night stands.

If left untreated, a hypomanic episode could progress onto a manic episode, a far more dangerous state. A manic episode is often completely out of control and can potentially end up needing a hospitalization.

Mania Warning Signs

Warning signs of a hypomanic episode that has progressed into a manic episode include (but are not limited to):

- Your speech may become very pressured and rapid, and others may find it hard to understand you.
- As your speech becomes more rapid, you may find that what you are saying comes out garbled, and does not make sense.

- You may become highly agitated by the smallest things.
- You may be extremely restless and unable to stay still.
- The racing thoughts may become very extreme, and you may find yourself completely unable to keep up with the pace your mind is working at.
- You may find yourself having many big plans and ideas about what you might be capable of, and you may start acting on these in a dramatic way.
- Drink and street drugs may be more appealing as you have far fewer internal boundaries during these episodes.
- You may develop heightened senses, colors may seem brighter, and sounds may seem sharper.
- You may dress and behave inappropriately for a given situation (i.e., dressing in a costume for work).
- In extreme cases, mania can include psychotic symptoms, so you may feel you are being watched, or that you are being followed.
- Another symptom of psychosis is hallucinations, so you may see and hear things that are not real.

It is important for caregivers to be mindful of these warning signs as well as the individual with bipolar disorder, as the caregiver may spot the signs more rapidly – for example, multiple changes in appearance, changes in general demeanor, and a decreased need for rest or sleep could be early warning signs that the individual themselves may not spot at first.

If a Loved One is Showing Signs of Mania

Bipolar mood changes are very different from the normal mood changes that everyone has, and it is vital to note this. If every shift in mood is monitored tightly then the individual may feel suffocated and unable to live their life properly. Try not to question every mood change but rather look out for the danger signs.

In general, bipolar mood changes last much longer than a normal mood, are far more intense in their appearance and will cause a lot of disruption to the usual life of the individual. A useful way of approaching the situation could be to ask the person with bipolar if they have noticed any changes in their mood recently and remind them of past episodes and how they began to show themselves initially.

Clinical intervention may not seem appealing, so this may need to be negotiated. Try not to get caught up in the mood yourself, as hard as this may be, be there for reassurance and support but remember to look after yourself as well.

If You are Showing Signs of Mania

If you feel you may be slipping into a manic episode, it is important to seek help from those around you and your medical team as soon as possible in order to raise awareness.

You can also do many things outside of episodes in order to prevent them happening, some of which include:

- **Keeping stress in check –** This may seem an impossible task at first, however asking for help from those around you, asking for extensions on work and essays etc. can go a long way towards helping your state of mind.
- **Ensure your sleep cycle is at it's best –** A disrupted sleep cycle is a big red flag with bipolar disorder, and while one day may not result in an episode, it is important to ensure you stick to a routine.
- **Having a contingency plan is important –** Do you overspend on a manic episode? If so, it could be an idea to have a loved one who you can trust fully able to step in and help take control of your finances to avoid you getting into trouble, or it might be helpful to have a medical contingency plan in place as well.
- **Get educated on your illness –** Read about the disorder, ask professionals – the more you know the more likely you are to spot a potential episode.
- **Monitor your moods –** A mood diary is a highly efficient way to track how you are feeling, especially if you include a basic mood scale.

It is important not to let a diagnosis of bipolar stand in your way of enjoying life to its fullest. We all have mood

changes at times, and just because you might have a diagnosis of bipolar, does not mean that each change is the precursor to an episode.

Get educated about your disorder, learn the early warning signs of a bipolar episode, and remember to always ask for help from those around you!