

# Do You Have Bipolar Disorder?

## Objective

To understand the signs and symptoms of bipolar disorder.

## What to Know

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that causes unpredictable and extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression).

When you are depressed, you may feel sad, hopeless, or lose interest in most activities. When you experience mania or hypomania (less extreme than mania), you might feel euphoric, full of energy, or very irritable. These mood swings can affect sleep, energy levels, judgment, behavior, and the ability to think clearly.

There are three basic types of bipolar disorder, and each may include mania or hypomania and depression.

- **Bipolar I disorder.** Includes at least one manic episode that may be preceded or followed by hypomanic or major depressive episodes; mania may trigger a break from reality (psychosis)
- **Bipolar II disorder.** Includes at least one major depressive episode and at least one hypomanic episode
- **Cyclothymic disorder.** At least two years (or one year in children and teens) of many episodes of hypomania and depression

While the manic episodes of bipolar I disorder can be severe and dangerous, bipolar II disorder is characterized by longer periods of depression. Although bipolar disorder can occur at any age, it is usually diagnosed during adolescence or early 20s. Symptoms vary from person to person and may vary over time.

## What to Do

To be diagnosed with bipolar I disorder, you must have had at least one manic episode that lasts at least one week, plus four of the other symptoms described below. You must also have at least five symptoms of major depression during the same 2-week period. A formal diagnosis must be made by a mental health professional.

**Symptoms of mania and/or hypomania.** Check off any of the symptoms you have experienced.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Euphoria.** More than just a good mood, it is feeling like you can't possibly feel better.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

- Irritability.** You argue with others and get into fights.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Unrealistic, inflated self-esteem.** Perhaps you think your ideas are brilliant, or you're far superior or more attractive than others.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- You don't need much sleep, or you're unable to sleep at all.**  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Unusually talkative, pressured to keep talking, interrupting others.** Other people might point this out to you.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Speedy or racing thoughts.**  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Unusual distractibility.** Interferes with concentration, organization, task completion, and decision-making.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Extreme restlessness or hyperactivity.**  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Risky behaviors.** Might include driving too fast, sexual indiscretions, or spending sprees.  
What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

How many symptoms of mania or hypomania did you check off? \_\_\_\_\_

How have these symptoms caused problems for you or interfered with your life?

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*Some of these symptoms can be caused by drug use or medical conditions, so if you had any of these symptoms when using substances or when suffering from a health condition, it would not be considered a manic episode of bipolar disorder.*

**Symptoms of depression.** Check off any of the symptoms you have experienced.

- Low or sad mood.** You might feel tearful, empty, or lonely. The sad mood doesn't improve even when good things happen.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Loss of interest and little enjoyment in usual activities.**  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Significant changes in appetite and/or weight.** You may have little appetite or eat when you're not hungry.  
What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
- Trouble falling or staying asleep or sleeping too much.**

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling restless or slowed down.**

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Exhaustion.** You may lack the physical energy to do even simple tasks.

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling worthless or guilty.** You might believe your existence is meaningless.

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Poor concentration and trouble making decisions.**

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Suicidal thoughts.**

What did it feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

How many symptoms of depression did you check off? \_\_\_\_\_

How have these symptoms caused problems for you or interfered with your life?

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Have you identified a pattern to your bipolar episodes and what triggers them? Explain.

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*If you feel like you are about to act on suicidal thoughts, call 911, go to your nearest hospital emergency room, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273- 8255. Store these numbers in your phone now.*

If you are not currently seeing a mental health professional, it might be time to schedule an appointment. Getting treatment at the earliest signs of bipolar symptoms can help prevent them from worsening. If you think you have bipolar disorder, or you've been diagnosed by a mental health practitioner, here are some strategies that can help prevent minor symptoms from becoming full-blown episodes.

- **Pay attention to warning signs.** Address symptoms early to prevent episodes from getting worse. Call your therapist if you think an episode of depression or mania is starting. Involve loved ones in watching for warning signs.
- **Avoid recreational drugs and alcohol.** Misusing substances can worsen your symptoms and make them more likely to come back.

- **If prescribed, take your medications exactly as directed.** Stopping your medication or reducing your dose on your own may cause withdrawal effects or your symptoms may worsen or return.

What else can you do to prevent worsening of symptoms or full-blown episodes?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

Who can you share this information with?

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What surprised you about this exercise?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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