How Has Bipolar Disorder Affected Your Life?

Objective

To identify how bipolar disorder has affected every aspect of your life.

What to Know

Bipolar disorder can impact your life in many ways, especially if it is untreated. Mood episodes – depressed, manic, or hypomanic – disrupt your life in significant ways. Here are some of the areas that can be affected.

- **Relationships.** The people in your life are affected by your symptoms because it can be impossible to predict your moods. You might struggle to form and sustain long-term relationships, or perhaps you have even lost friendships or other relationships.
- **Work, Career, and School.** Job- and school-related difficulties are common, and people with bipolar disorder tend to have higher rates of absenteeism. Perhaps you are either extremely productive and focused, or disinterested and distracted. This can make it challenging to maintain a full-time job, focus on a career path, or complete educational studies. Maybe you have lost a job or experienced a reduction in income because of bipolar disorder.
- **Hobbies.** You might suddenly be interested in an activity or hobby when you are manic, then just as quickly lose interest. Hobbies and leisure activities provide a healthy outlet for you to channel manic energy. However, during a depressive episode, you may lack the energy and motivation to participate in activities you once enjoyed.
- **Sleep.** Sleep patterns are one of the most impacted areas if you have bipolar disorder. When you are manic, you can often function on less sleep, or may even feel like you do not need to sleep at all. During a depressive episode, you might have insomnia or sleep too much.
- **Eating.** Fluctuations in mood can influence eating habits. During a manic episode, you might eat less, but when depressed you might overeat. Research has found there is a connection between bipolar and eating disorders.
- **Health.** When you use or abuse drugs or alcohol, they often influence your mood more than other people. Drugs and alcohol can also trigger manic or depressive episodes. If you take medication as part of your treatment plan, adding drugs and alcohol to the mix can cause adverse side effects. Even though it might be best for you to avoid substances, you might struggle with this as you try to cope with or regulate moods.
- **Physical Activity.** During a manic episode, physical activity can provide an outlet for excess energy. When you are depressed, you might not feel like exercising, but physical activity can be a great motivational tool and aid in mood regulation.
- What are some other areas of your life affected by bipolar disorder?

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What to Do

Over the next two weeks, track what areas of your life are affected by bipolar disorder. Write down the date, the area(s) of life affected by your symptoms or mood episode, and then describe what happened. Finally, write down how you coped and whether it was healthy or unhealthy. Read the example below.

Date	Area(s) of life	What happened?	How did you cope?
10/25	1. Relationships 2. Financial	I went on a shopping trip and spent the money set aside to pay the mortgage. My partner was furious with me, and we got into a fight.	I returned several of the items I purchased for refunds. I apologized to my partner, and we discussed alternatives to overspending. For the first time, I addressed this issue in a healthy way and I have a plan for the next time I want to go on a spending spree.

Date	Area(s) of life	What happened?	How did you cope?

Over the past two weeks, what were the top three areas of your life most impacted by bipolar disorder?

1._____

2._____

3._____

What was the ONE area affected the most? _____

Was this activity difficult or easy for you to complete? Why? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

Did anything surprise you? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

If you had difficulty identifying healthy ways to cope, is there someone who can help you?
Write down 2-3 names of people or resources that can support you.

_____

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Reflections on This Exercise

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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