

## Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). When you become depressed, you may feel sad or hopeless and lose interest or pleasure in most activities. When your mood shifts to mania or hypomania (less extreme than mania), you may feel euphoric, full of energy or unusually irritable. These mood swings can affect sleep, energy, activity, judgment, behaviour and the ability to think clearly.

### The illness is usually classified as follows:

- Bipolar 1 disorder: Periods of manic episodes lasting about a week, followed by depression lasting about two weeks.
- Bipolar 2 disorder: Periods of hypomanic episodes lasting about four days, followed by depression lasting about two weeks.
- Cyclothymia: Longer, less intense periods of mania and depression over a two-year period (shorter in adolescents and children).
- Other related bipolar spectrum disorders: Those that do not fit into any of the above classifications.

## Causes

The cause of bipolar disorder is unknown, but the following factors may be involved:

- **Biological differences:** People with bipolar disorder appear to have physical changes in their brains
- **Genetics:** Bipolar disorder is more common in people who have a first-degree relative, such as a sibling or parent, with the condition.

## Risk factors

Factors that may increase the risk of developing bipolar disorder:

- Having a first-degree relative, such as a parent or sibling, with bipolar disorder
- Periods of high stress, such as the death of a loved one or another traumatic event
- Drug or alcohol abuse

## Symptoms

People having manic episode may:	People having depressive episode may:
Feel very up, high, elated, or irritable or touchy	Feel very sad, down, empty, worried, or hopeless
Feel jumpy or wired	Feel slowed down or restless

Have a decreased need for sleep	Have trouble falling asleep, wake up too early, or sleep too much.
Have a loss of appetite	Experience increased appetite and weight gain
Talk very fast about a lot of different things	Talk very slowly, feel like they have nothing to say, forget a lot
Feel like their thoughts are racing	Have trouble concentrating or making decisions
Think they can do a lot of things at once	Feel unable to do even simple things
Feel like they are unusually important, talented, or powerful	Feel hopeless or worthless, think about death or suicide

### **Tips for managing bipolar disorder and maintaining balance**

- Learn as much as you can about the illness.
- Exercise regularly to lift your mood.
- Keep regular routines.
- Aim to keep your stress levels in check.
- Keep track of your mood and factors affecting how you feel. Try to address issues before there is a change in your mood.
- Make sure you have people you can turn to for support, help and encouragement.
- Stay close to family and friends so you can talk to them about what you are experiencing.

### **Complications**

Bipolar disorder can result in serious problems that affect every area of your life, such as:

- Problems related to drug and alcohol use
- Suicide or suicide attempts
- Legal or financial problems
- Damaged relationships
- Poor work or school performance

### **Treatment and therapy**

- An effective plan usually includes a combination of medication and psychotherapy.
- Medication generally used to treat bipolar disorder includes mood stabilisers and second-generation antipsychotics.

**If you are thinking about harming yourself or suicide:**

- Tell someone who can help right away.
- Call control room. Contact numbers are on the back of your student card.
- Call your doctor or health care provider.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

**Self-assessment tool**

QUESTIONS	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	Just a little	Somewhat	Moderately	Quite a lot	Very much
1. At times I am much more talkative or speak much faster than usual.						
2. There have been times when I was much more active or did many more things than usual.						
3. I get into moods where I feel very speeded up or irritable.						
4. There have been times when I felt both high (elated) and low (depressed) at the same time.						
5. At times I have been much more interested in sex than usual.						
6. My self-confidence ranges from great self-doubt to equally great overconfidence.						
7. There have been GREAT variations in the quantity or quality of my work.						
8. For no apparent reason I sometimes have been VERY angry or hostile.						
9. I have periods of mental dullness and other periods of very creative thinking.						

10. At times I am greatly interested in being with people and at other times I just want to be left alone with my thoughts.						
11. I have had periods of great optimism and other periods of equally great pessimism.						
12. I have had periods of tearfulness and crying and other times when I laugh and joke excessively.						

### Scoring key

#### Scores are added up over the 12 questions.

- Individuals with total scores of 15 or less are most likely suffering from major (unipolar) depression.
- Those scoring between 16 and 24 may have either major depression or a disorder in the bipolar spectrum.
- Those scoring 25 or more have a high probability of having a bipolar spectrum disorder.

### References

<https://www.akeso.co.za/Disorders/Bipolar-mood-disorders>

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

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