Bipolar Disorder

What is it?

Bipolar disorder is an illness that causes extreme mood changes, from times of very high energy (manic episodes) to times of depression. But many people with bipolar disorder show only the symptoms of depression. These moods may cause problems with your work, school, family life, friendships, and how well you function.

This disease is also called manic-depression.

There is no cure for bipolar disorder, but it can be helped with medicines. Counseling may also help. It is important to take your medicines exactly as prescribed, even when you feel well. You may need lifelong treatment.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It’s also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Be safe with medicines. Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Do not stop or change a medicine without talking to your doctor first. You and your doctor may need to try different combinations of medicines to find what works for you.
- Take your medicines on schedule to keep your moods even. When you feel good, you may think that you do not need your medicines. But it is important to keep taking them.
- Go to your counseling sessions. Call and talk with your counselor if you can’t go to a session or if you don’t think the sessions are helping. Do not just stop going.
- Get at least 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week. Walking is a good choice. You also may want to do other things, such as running, swimming, or cycling.
- Get enough sleep. Keep your room dark and quiet. Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
- Eat a healthy diet. This includes whole grains, dairy, fruits, vegetables, and protein. Eat foods from each of these groups.
Try to lower your stress. Manage your time, build a strong support system, and lead a healthy lifestyle. To lower your stress, try physical activity, slow deep breathing, or getting a massage.

Do not use alcohol or illegal drugs.

Learn the early signs of your mood changes. You can then take steps to help yourself feel better.

Ask for help from friends and family when you need it. You may need help with daily chores when you are depressed. When you are manic, you may need support to control your high energy levels.

What should you do if someone in your family has bipolar disorder?

Learn about the disease and the signs that it is getting worse.

Remind your family member that you love him or her.

Make a plan with all family members about how to take care of your loved one when his or her symptoms are bad.

Talk about your fears and concerns and those of other family members. Seek counseling if needed.

Do not focus attention only on the person who is in treatment.

Remind yourself that it will take time for changes to occur.

Do not blame yourself for the disease.

Know your legal rights and the legal rights of your family member. Support groups or counselors can help you with this information.

Take care of yourself. Keep up with your own interests, such as your career, hobbies, and friends. Use exercise, positive self-talk, deep breathing, and other relaxing exercises to help lower your stress.

Give yourself time to grieve. You may need to deal with emotions such as anger, fear, and frustration. After you work through your feelings, you will be better able to care for yourself and your family.

If you are having a hard time with your feelings or with your relationship with your family member, talk with a counselor.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You feel you cannot stop from hurting yourself or someone else.
- Someone who has bipolar disorder displays dangerous behavior, and you think the person might hurt himself or herself or someone else.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You hear voices.
- Someone you know has bipolar disorder and talks about suicide. If a suicide threat seems real, with a specific plan and a way to carry it out, stay with the person, or ask someone you trust to stay with the person, until you can get help.
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- Someone you know has bipolar disorder and:
  - Starts to give away possessions.
  - Is using illegal drugs or drinking alcohol heavily.
  - Talks or writes about death, including writing suicide notes or talking about guns, knives, or pills.
  - Talks or writes about hurting someone else.
  - Starts to spend a lot of time alone.
  - Acts very aggressively or suddenly appears calm.
  - Talks about beliefs that are not based in reality (delusions).

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:
- You cannot go to your counseling sessions.

For more information go to:
- kp.org/santaclara/bhc
- Bipolar disorder - Mental health and emotional wellness

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