

# Bipolar Disorder

## What is bipolar disorder?

**Southeast Kansas  
Mental Health  
Center**



Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels. These shifts, or “mood episodes,” are more extreme than the regular ups and downs of life. There are several types of bipolar disorders with different symptoms.

**Depression** - a devastating "low" where the person has little interest in things that are usually enjoyable and can barely function.

**Mania** - a frantic oversupply of confidence and energy which often leads to reckless behavior.

**Normal Moods** - feelings that occur between episodes of depression and mania.

## Symptoms

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### Depression phase:

- Feel sad or blue.
- Lose/gain weight, change in appetite.
- Feel worthless, hopeless, or guilty.
- Lose interest in people and activities.
- Feel tired or restless.
- Sleep too little or too much.
- Have unexplained aches and pains.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

### Mania phase:

- Feel on top of the world.
- Have increased energy and need less sleep.
- Hyperactive and over-commit.
- Racing thoughts, mind jumps around and over talking.
- Overconfident and takes extreme risks.
- Easily distracted and irritated.
- Unable to focus to finish tasks or projects
- Impaired judgment.

**Hypomania** - feel good but may change to full-blown mania or depression.

**Mixed mood** - feelings of mania and depression that switch in the same day.

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*Each phase length may vary from days to months.*

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## Causes

**Heredity** - may run in families. Studies show that people who inherit a certain gene are more likely to develop the illness.

**Chemical Changes** - changes in the brain may be linked to bipolar disorder.

• **Stress or Anxiety:** - Manic or depressive episodes may be triggered by physical illness, money problems, or other stressors.

# Triggers of Mood Changes

- Life stressors, such as financial problems.
- Not having a sleep schedule.
- Stopping or starting medicine for depression or another health condition.
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Thyroid issues or other health problems
- Seasonal changes.
- Holidays.
- Problems with family, friends, or at work.
- Death of a loved one.

## Treatment

Bipolar disorder is treatable. Medication is commonly used in combination with psychotherapy.

**Medication to Stabilize Mood** - May delay or decrease mood highs and lows. Some medications help treat mood episodes in the short term, while others provide support for longer periods.

**Medicine for Depression** - Does not treat the whole illness. It is usually prescribed to help alleviate depression, but it can be used in combination with other drugs to stabilize moods.

**Psychotherapy** - Individual, group, and family psychotherapy is important for the patient as well as family. Therapy can help illuminate behaviors, thought patterns, problems with current relationships, and difficulties in managing the illness. Patients can learn their personal triggers of mood changes.

**Support Groups** - Offers important opportunities to gain emotional support and learn about the illness, its treatment, how others have coped, and mental health treatment.

**Be Consistent** - Stay on a treatment plan with close monitoring of medication to find the right dose. Find a way to remember your medicine: write down your medicines, use a pillbox to organize, put up a calendar, reminders on cell phone.

**Always Take Your Medicine** - Take your medicine even if you feel fine and as prescribed by your doctor. Medications are needed to keep moods stabilized.

**Inform Your Doctor** - Tell your doctor how the medicine makes you feel. Don't stop treatment without first talking with your doctor.

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