

Bipolar Disorder

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What is bipolar disorder?

People with bipolar disorder have periods when their mood is very high or very low. These **episodes** may last for several days, weeks, or months. In between these episodes, the person's mood may be normal.

The period of very high mood and other symptoms is called **mania**.

The period of very low mood and other symptoms is called **depression**.

What causes bipolar disorder?

The cause of bipolar disorder is not known. Many factors play a role. They include changes in brain chemistry and nerve cells, and your genetics (bipolar disorder runs in families). Often, a common response to certain medications will also run in families.

What are the symptoms of mania?

- › More energy than usual (physical and mental) and can feel hyper with less need for sleep. For example, they may feel rested after only 3 hours of sleep.
- › A positive, broad outlook on life, and can feel overly joyful and energetic.
- › Very irritable and sometimes shows aggressive behaviour.
- › Talking very fast and sometimes has mixed-up speech, with a need to keep talking.
- › Having too many thoughts at once and acts distracted.
- › Poor judgment and can be impulsive which could lead to risk-taking behaviour (like shopping sprees, drug use, many sexual partners or having reckless sex).
- › Self-esteem that is very high or over the top. For example, they may act like they are better than others.
- › In severe (very bad) cases, people can hallucinate. For example, they may hear or see something that is not actually there. They may also have delusions. For example, they believe something that is not true even when shown proof.

What are the symptoms of depression?

- › Feeling sad or low most of the day
- › Crying for no reason
- › Eating a lot more or a lot less than usual
- › Having little energy
- › Trouble sleeping or sleeping all the time
- › Having many feelings all at once such as being irritable, angry, worried, agitated, or anxious
- › Muscle aches and pains for no reason
- › Feeling guilty, worthless, and/or hopeless for no reason
- › Poor concentration
- › Trouble making decisions
- › Losing interest and pleasure in your usual activities
- › Drinking too much or using drugs
- › Thinking about death or suicide

How is bipolar disorder treated?

- Bipolar disorder is usually treated with both medication and therapy. Mood stabilizers are the most common type of medications used to treat bipolar disorder.
- Your health care team will choose the medication that is best for you depending on your symptoms, side effects, and family history. You may also be prescribed other medications to treat sleep problems, anxiety, or other symptoms.
- Therapy (talk therapy) is an important part of treatment. It can give you and your family education, peer support, and coping strategies for a healthy lifestyle.

Where can I get help?

- The first step is to tell someone, like a friend or family member, how you are feeling. That way, you are not alone. Your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) can get you started on treatment or refer you to local mental health services.

In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

In Nova Scotia, to get help right away, call the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team:

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

- For ongoing support, join a self-help group. Find a group that teaches positive coping strategies where you feel welcomed and valued as part of the group.
- **For more information, visit The Mood Disorders Society of Canada's website for resources in English and French:**
 - › www.mooddisorderscanada.ca/page/resources

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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www.nshealth.ca

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