

## Bipolar Disorder

### What is bipolar disorder?

- Bipolar disorder is a treatable mood disorder. It is also called **manic depression**.
- People with bipolar disorder have unusual mood states. These can include:
  - › Feeling consistently very happy and “up”, and being very active. This is called **mania**.
  - › Feeling consistently very sad and “down”, or hopeless, and not being active. This is called **depression**.
- These mood states can last days, weeks, or months, and have a significant impact on functioning (like being able to work, or do everyday tasks).
- In between these unusual mood states, you may have days, weeks, months, or years with no symptoms.

### What causes bipolar disorder?

- The cause of bipolar disorder is not known. The risk factors for developing the disorder include:
  - › Your genetics (genes passed down by your family)
  - › Your biology
  - › Changes in your brain chemistry and nerve cells
- **Other risk factors for bipolar disorder include:**
  - › Not able to access care when it is needed
  - › Not able to access the right level of health care
  - › Not able to access the resources needed to be healthy (like food, housing, a job)
  - › Adverse (bad) childhood experiences
  - › Environmental factors (like stress, not enough sleep, and substance use)

## **What are the symptoms of mania?**

- Symptoms of mania include a major and unusual change in thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, like:
  - › Having more physical and mental energy
  - › Being more active
  - › Feeling more happy and excited
  - › Talking more than usual, talking faster, or feeling like you need to keep talking
  - › Your thoughts feel faster, or you have too many thoughts at once
  - › Needing less sleep (for example, you may feel rested after only 3 hours of sleep)
  - › Feeling distracted or having trouble focusing
  - › Feeling irritable
  - › Acting aggressively (this is very rare)
  - › Being more impulsive or doing risky things (acting or making choices without planning or thinking about the effects)
    - › This may cause you to do things that are out of character for you (like spending large amounts of money, using drugs, or having higher-risk sex)
  - › Unusually high self-esteem (for example, you may act or feel like you are better than other people)
  - › In some cases of bipolar disorder, people also have:
    - › Hallucinations (hearing or seeing something that is not there)
    - › Delusions (a strong belief that something is true or real even though there is no evidence)

## **What are the symptoms of depression?**

- Symptoms of depression include a major and unusual change in thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, like:
  - › Feeling sad or low for most of the day
  - › Eating a lot more or a lot less than usual
  - › Feeling very tired, or having less physical and mental energy
  - › Trouble thinking, having fewer thoughts, or thoughts feeling slower
  - › Unusual aches and pains
  - › Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
  - › Feeling irritable or angry
  - › Feeling worried or anxious
  - › Feeling guilty or worthless
  - › Trouble focusing or concentrating

- › Trouble with memory
- › Finding it hard to make decisions
- › Losing interest and pleasure in most activities
- › Feeling hopeless or helpless
- › Thoughts of suicide or death

## **How is bipolar disorder treated?**

- Finding the right treatment for you depends on:
  - › Your symptoms
  - › Possible side effects
  - › Your medical history
  - › Your family medical history

## **Medications**

- Bipolar disorder is commonly treated with mood stabilizers.
  - › In some cases, anti-psychotic medications may be used.
- Other medications may be used to treat symptoms related to bipolar disorder like problems with sleep or anxiety.
- Anti-depressants are not recommended for people with bipolar disorder.

## **Other treatment options**

- › Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- › Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS)
- › Deep brain stimulation
- › Psychotherapy:
  - › Cognitive behavioural therapy
  - › Family-focused therapy
  - › Interpersonal or social-rhythm therapy

Your health care team will talk with you about your treatment options.

## **How do I manage bipolar disorder and prevent relapse?**

- Learn about your triggers, early warning signs, and symptoms
- Recognize symptoms early to get help right away
- Get help from people you trust, support groups, or mental health services
- Tell your health care team about your symptoms

- Lifestyle factors, like:
  - › Exercise
  - › Regular sleep schedule
  - › Eating healthy
  - › Limiting or avoiding substance use

The goals of relapse prevention are to:

- › Lower how many episodes you have
- › Make your episodes shorter
- › Help you to manage how severe (very bad) your episodes are

## Where can I get help?

- By telling your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) about your experience, you can learn about your treatment options, get started on treatment, or they can connect you to local mental health services.
- Talk to your primary health care provider about local community or online resources like:
  - › Support groups
  - › Education about symptoms, symptom management, and coping skills

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

To get help right away, call the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team:

- › **Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167**

**For more information, visit The Mood Disorders Society of Canada's website for resources in English and French:**

- › <https://mdsc.ca/>

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

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

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