

Top Tips for Managing Bipolar

Know Your Triggers

To manage your mood you need to know what triggers your depression and mania. Keep a mood diary for two weeks and keep track of: your daily mood, any significant events during the day, how many hours you slept, your level of anxiety or agitation (/10), and any medications.

Seek Help

With the right treatment, bipolar can be a very manageable disorder. Medication is an important part of treatment, but medication with psychological intervention is generally considered the best and most effective treatment approach.

Everyone responds differently to medication so it may take a while to find the right medication for you. Decisions about medication should be made in consultation with your GP or psychiatrist. Psychological interventions shown to be effective with bipolar include: Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy and Interpersonal and Social Rhythms Therapy.

Establish a Good Sleep Routine

Disrupted circadian rhythms can be a trigger for depression and mania. Our circadian rhythms are driven by our body clock so having good sleep habits is important for maintaining a stable mood. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. If you're having trouble sleeping establish a sleep routine (e.g. dinner, TV, shower, read, bed) and make sure you switch off from work a few hours before bed. Your body clock is affected by light so expose yourself to natural light first thing in the morning and keep lights dimmed in the evenings.

Limit Stress

Stress can trigger depression and mania, possibly because it affects sleep and therefore disrupts circadian rhythms. Limit your stress by problem solving (instead of avoiding). Forget logistics, just brainstorm possible solutions for stressors, look at the pros and cons of each, and implement the most effective solution.

Having a healthy work/life balance will also help you limit your stress. If your work/life balance feels out of control, think about what you can put in place to switch off from work and get a better balance.

Know Your Early Warning Signs

Knowing your early warnings signs will help you to take action earlier and prevent severe episodes of mania and depression. Examples of early warning signs for depression are: wanting to spend time alone, trouble sleeping, and feeling down. Early warning signs of mania might include: feeling more confident than usual, feeling restless, feeling happier than usual, and changes to sleep patterns.

BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar is a disorder that causes shifts in mood between depression and mania.

Symptoms of Mania include:

- Feeling euphoric or irritable
- Feeling uncharacteristically confident
- Racing thoughts
- Getting easily distracted
- Speaking more quickly than usual
- Feeling energised
- Feeling like you don't need much sleep
- Uninhibited or risky behaviour

Symptoms of depression are:

- Low mood
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling worthless
- Poor concentration
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Changes to sleep and appetite
- A loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities
- Thoughts about death and dying

Like diabetes or heart disease, bipolar requires careful management, but with medication and psychological intervention it is possible to live a relatively normal life.

Both Interpersonal and Social Rhythms Therapy (ISRT) and CBT have been shown to be effective in treating bipolar. ISRT is less well known than CBT but is unique in that it was developed specifically for the treatment of Bipolar.

If you have Bipolar Disorder, see your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist with experience with CBT and ISRT.