

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is a mental health condition involving **changes in mood, energy, activity, and functioning** that go beyond normal mood variation. This leaflet provides general information about bipolar disorder and how it is understood in psychiatric care.

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is characterised by **episodes of mood elevation and episodes of depression**, with periods of relative stability in between.

Mood changes are:

- More intense than everyday mood fluctuations
 - Sustained over days to weeks
 - Associated with changes in energy, behaviour, and functioning
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Types of Mood Episodes

Depressive Episodes

Symptoms may include:

- Low mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Low energy
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness or guilt

These episodes resemble major depression.

Manic or Hypomanic Episodes

Mood elevation may involve:

- Increased energy or activity
- Reduced need for sleep
- Racing thoughts

- Increased talkativeness
- Increased confidence or impulsivity

Mania is more severe and may impair judgement significantly.

Hypomania is milder but still represents a change from usual functioning.

Bipolar Disorder Is Not Just Mood Swings

Bipolar disorder is **not**:

- Normal ups and downs
- Rapid mood changes within a day
- A personality trait

Episodes are sustained and represent a clear departure from a person's usual state.

How Bipolar Disorder Affects Daily Life

Bipolar disorder can affect:

- Work and study
- Relationships
- Sleep and routine
- Decision-making

Impact varies depending on:

- Episode severity
 - Frequency of episodes
 - Treatment and supports in place
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Causes and Contributing Factors

Bipolar disorder develops due to a combination of factors, including:

- Biological and genetic vulnerability
- Brain chemistry and regulation
- Stressful life events

There is no single cause.

Diagnosis and Assessment

Diagnosis is based on:

- Careful clinical assessment
- History of mood episodes over time
- Information from multiple sources where appropriate

Diagnosis often takes time and may be reviewed as more information becomes available.

Treatment Approaches

Treatment for bipolar disorder may include:

- Mood-stabilising medications
- Careful use of antidepressants where appropriate
- Psychological support
- Routine, sleep, and lifestyle management

Treatment focuses on **stability and relapse prevention**, not just symptom relief.

Importance of Ongoing Treatment

Bipolar disorder is usually a **long-term condition**.

Ongoing treatment helps:

- Reduce relapse risk
- Stabilise mood
- Support functioning and quality of life

Regular review is an important part of care.

Bipolar Disorder and Work

Work capacity may fluctuate depending on mood state.

Supportive strategies may include:

- Stable routines
- Early response to warning signs
- Temporary adjustments during episodes

Many people with bipolar disorder work successfully with appropriate treatment.

When to Seek Help

Professional support is recommended if:

- Mood changes are persistent or severe
- Behaviour changes significantly
- Sleep and routine are disrupted
- Functioning is impaired

Early intervention can reduce episode severity.

Summary

Bipolar disorder is a treatable condition involving episodes of mood elevation and depression.

With appropriate, ongoing care, many people achieve stability and meaningful functioning.
