



A GUIDE THROUGH
THE BIPOLAR BRAIN

Living with Bipolar Disorder

The impact of bipolar disorder on...

Physical Health and Medical Concerns

- Physical health concerns exist for those with bipolar disorder, sometimes in relation to the medications used to treat the disorder. These conditions may include endocrine and metabolic disorders, diabetes, thyroid disorders, migraines, and cardiac issues.
- The medications used to treat bipolar disorder may also result in several side effects such as restlessness, dry mouth, joint/muscle pain, drowsiness, dizziness, headaches, gastrointestinal distress, heart burn, cold-like symptoms, blurred vision, rapid heartbeat, sun sensitivity, rashes, menstrual irregularities, and sexual dysfunction.
- Individuals with bipolar disorder may engage in high risk behaviors that have significant implications to one's health and well-being, including reckless behavior, sexual promiscuity, and alcohol/drug use.
- The risk of suicide increases significantly for those with bipolar disorder, compared to the general population.

Economic Decisions and Well-being

- High risk behaviors during manic phases may have significant financial implications such as replacing damaged possessions, shopping sprees, legal fees, loss of employment, increased insurance, and medical costs.
- Due to lags in recovery, frequent absences, and the impact of manic and depressive episodes on overall functioning, individuals with bipolar disorder tend to have lower socioeconomic status.
- Manic and depressive episodes have implications for one's cognitive functioning; cognitive impairments associated with bipolar disorder have implications for occupational functioning and thus economic stability.

Social Relationships and Well-being



- Some individuals with bipolar disorder have difficulties with social relationships and emotional attachment to others.
- Individuals living with bipolar disorder may at times be described as needy, irritable, volatile, or paranoid. Mood swings and high risk behavior can be confusing to friends and families. These features take a toll on one's relationships.
- Friends and family may feel guilt, grief, and worry. Disruption in routines, dealing with bizarre behavior, and financial stressors, all due to the symptoms of bipolar disorder, can strain relationships with spouses, partners, family members, and friends.
- Family roles may change due to the needs of the individual's illness; spouses may not be able to rely on partners to manage family responsibilities; children may be put in the position of caretaker.

Well-being and Resilience – What is it and why is it important?

“Resilience” refers to the ability to adapt when facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress, including the issues surrounding mental illness. Resilience or “grit” means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences. Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress; all people face adversity or trauma at various times in their lives.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have; it is something that can be developed and encouraged. Being resilient involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Resilience can be fostered many ways and it is important to determine some ways to build resiliency that can become a part of one's personal strategy.

Keys to building resilience include:

Building Gratitude

- Create a reminder or screensaver to be “thankful”...remind yourself to be thankful! A sticky note on the bathroom mirror or by the sink that says simply “thanks” is an easy place to start.
- Each morning or evening, jot down three things that you have chosen to be grateful for – listing the positive builds a positive thinking cycle.
- Remind yourself that change is a part of living. Although some goals may no longer be attainable as a result of natural and adverse changes, other new meaningful goals will



appear. By accepting circumstances that cannot be changed, one can focus on circumstances that you can impact and control.

Remembering and Reflecting

- Reflect and think back on places that make you feel happy. Return to those places physically or using visualization.
- Remember how you have coped successfully with difficulty in the past. What strategies worked? Focusing on past experiences and sources of personal strength can help you learn which strategies for building resilience might work. Where did the challenges lead you? How were you able to overcome those obstacles?
- Keep a running list of big and little things you love and are grateful for. During challenging times the list can pull you back to the positive.

Becoming Proactive

- Know the times, places, and situations that frustrate you. Find ONE THING in that situation that you can be grateful for.
- Remember that setbacks happen for everyone, and although it will take time, know that your situation can improve if you work at it!
- Nurture a positive view of yourself. Develop confidence in your ability to solve problems and address goals, including self-care and growth.
- Do one thing every day that brings you joy, peace, and comfort.

Focusing on Maintaining Health and Wellness: Following a treatment plan and staying compliant with medication and therapy appointments is critical to one's overall health and wellness, and can assist in building resilience.

- **Healthy living:** Bipolar disorder often involves risk taking behavior with potentially harmful and dangerous consequences. Frequently, individuals with bipolar disorder abuse drugs and alcohol in an attempt to self-medicate their extremes in mood. Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol and only take medications as prescribed.
- **Spiritual:** Many individuals seek comfort and peace in spirituality and faith. Participating in groups and activities focused on spirituality and faith can provide a network of social support and help to regulate emotions.
- **Nutritional:** Following a healthy diet ensures that one's body and medication are working at optimum levels and helps to reduce some of the health concerns associated with bipolar disorder. Nutritionists and physicians can recommend healthy diet and exercise plans in conjunction with other elements of a treatment plan.



- Emotional support: Surrounding oneself with others who are supportive and understanding can minimize stressors.
- Sleep: Getting sufficient sleep is integral to managing one's mood. Many individuals report better sleep after receiving medication management. Continued sleep difficulties should be discussed with one's physician.
- Recreation/Leisure: It is beneficial to explore ways to remain engaged with people and stay productive. Developing hobbies and interests allows for social engagement, stress reduction, and improved quality of life.
- Stress management: Learning to relax and manage one's stressors are an important part of treatment. Activities such as exercising, yoga, and meditation are helpful in working toward minimizing the stressors that can lead to a manic or depressive episode.