**Cyclothymia**

**Cyclothymia, or cyclothymic disorder, causes mood changes – from feeling low to emotional highs.**

Cyclothymia is a mild form of [bipolar disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/bipolar-disorder/overview/).

Most people's symptoms are mild enough that they do not seek mental health treatment, or the emotional highs feel nice, so they do not realise there's anything wrong or want to seek help.

This means cyclothymia often goes undiagnosed and untreated.

But the mood swings can affect daily life, and cause problems with personal and work relationships.

If you think you have cyclothymia, it's important to seek help from a GP.

People with cyclothymia are at risk of developing full bipolar disorder, so it's important to get help before reaching this stage.

People can get cyclothymia at any age.

**Symptoms of cyclothymia**

If you have cyclothymia, you'll have periods of feeling low followed by periods of feeling very happy and excited (called hypomania) when you do not need much sleep, are more sociable and impulsive and feel that you have a lot of energy.

The periods of low mood do not last long enough and are not severe enough to be diagnosed as [depression](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/depression-in-adults/overview/).

You might feel sluggish and lose interest in things during these periods, but this should not stop you going about your day-to-day life.

Mood swings will be fairly frequent – you will not go for longer than 2 months without experiencing low mood or an emotional high.

Doctors may diagnose cyclothymia if you've had symptoms for at least 2 years, or 1 year for children and teenagers.

Symptoms of cyclothymia are not severe enough for you to be diagnosed with full bipolar disorder, and your mood swings will be broken up by periods of normal mood.

**Treatment for cyclothymia**

Treatment usually involves some kind of [talking therapy](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapies/) (psychotherapy). You may also need medicines.

The aim is to:

* stop the cyclothymia developing into full bipolar disorder
* reduce your symptoms
* stop your symptoms coming back

**Psychotherapy**

Psychotherapy, such as [cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview/), may help with cyclothymia.

CBT involves talking to a trained therapist to find ways to help you manage your symptoms by changing the way you think and behave.

You'll be given practical ways to improve your state of mind on a daily basis.

**Medicines**

You may be prescribed medicines to level out your mood (mood stabilisers).

Mood stabilisers include:

* [lithium](https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/lithium/) – commonly used to treat bipolar disorder
* epilepsy medicines – such as [carbamazepine](https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/carbamazepine/), oxcarbazepine or [sodium valproate](https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/sodium-valproate/)

Some antipsychotics such as [quetiapine](https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/quetiapine/) are also sometimes used as mood stabilisers.

But not all people with cyclothymia need or respond to medicine.

The charity [Mind has more information on lithium and other mood stabilisers](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/lithium-and-other-mood-stabilisers/).

**Further support for cyclothymia**

[Find your nearest mental health support service](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/mental-health-adults-of-all-ages)

You may also find it helpful to join a support group so you can talk to others who share your experiences and problems.

You can ask your mental health service or GP if there's a local group you can join.

[Read about depression support groups](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/depression-in-adults/support-groups/)

Other organisations that can help include:

* [Bipolar UK](https://www.bipolaruk.org/)
* [Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/)
* [Rethink Mental Illness](https://www.rethink.org/home)

**Living with cyclothymia**

It's not known how many people with cyclothymia will go on to develop full [bipolar disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/bipolar-disorder/overview/).

But some people with cyclothymia see their elevated or depressed moods become more severe.

Other people will find their cyclothymia continues and they need to manage this as a lifelong condition.

**Causes of cyclothymia**

The causes of cyclothymia are not known, but there's probably a genetic link because cyclothymia, [depression](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/depression-in-adults/overview/) and [bipolar disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/bipolar-disorder/overview/) all tend to run in families.

In some people, traumatic events or experiences may act as a trigger for the condition, such as severe illness or long periods of [stress](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/stress/).

[Cyclothymia - NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/cyclothymia/)

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/cyclothymia/>

Page last reviewed: 9 October 2023  
Next review due: 9 October 2026