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Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition where you have extreme mood changes. Medicines and talking therapy can help manage it.

Get urgent help

Support is available if you or someone you know is having a mental health crisis or emergency, no matter what you're going through.

[Find out where to get urgent help for mental health](#)

Symptoms of bipolar disorder

The main symptom of bipolar disorder is extreme changes to your mood.

You sometimes have either:

- high moods (mania or hypomania) – for example, feeling very happy, excited or energetic

- low moods (depression) – for example, feeling sad, tired or hopeless

These moods usually last a few days or weeks at a time.

If you have bipolar disorder, you will usually have times where your mood is stable and you do not have any symptoms. This can last for weeks, months or years.

– [High mood \(mania and hypomania\) symptoms](#)

High moods in bipolar disorder can be severe (called mania) or mild (called hypomania).

Symptoms of high mood include:

- feeling very happy and excited
- feeling very irritable or aggressive
- having a lot of energy, feeling restless or not needing much sleep
- racing thoughts or not being able to concentrate
- speaking fast or talking a lot – you may not make sense to other people
- a high sex drive (libido)
- feeling overly confident or adventurous
- being impulsive or extravagant such as spending lots of money
- saying or doing things that are rude, inappropriate or not usual for you
- hearing things that are not real ([hallucinations](#)), believing things that are not true (delusions) or feeling paranoid

— [Low mood \(depression\) symptoms](#)

Symptoms of low mood in bipolar disorder include:

- feeling sad or upset
- not being interested in things you usually enjoy
- low energy or feeling very tired
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping a lot
- eating too much or too little
- low confidence
- feeling worthless or hopeless
- not being able to concentrate
- avoiding seeing or spending time with other people
- having suicidal thoughts or thoughts about harming yourself

See a GP if:

- you have extreme changes in your moods that last a long time or impact your everyday life
- you've been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and treatments are not helping (or speak to your mental health specialist if you have one)

If you're worried about someone else, encourage them to speak to their GP.

How bipolar disorder is diagnosed

If a GP thinks you may have bipolar disorder or another mental health condition, they will refer you to a mental health specialist (psychiatrist).

The mental health specialist will ask you about things like your moods, behaviour, health and family history.

Bipolar disorder can take time to diagnose because it affects everyone differently and the symptoms are similar to other mental health conditions.

Treatment for bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder cannot be cured, but there are treatments that can help manage it.

A mental health specialist will work with you to create a treatment plan.

Treatments you may have include:

- medicines to help stabilise your moods
- talking therapy such as [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#)

Some medicines you need to take all the time, others you only take when your symptoms get worse.

The medicines can cause side effects. These will vary depending on which medicine you take and how your body responds to it.

You'll usually have appointments at a GP surgery, clinic or hospital.

If doctors are worried you're at risk of [self-harm](#), [suicide](#) or harming someone else, you may need to stay in hospital or have support from a crisis team at home.

Important

Do not stop taking your bipolar disorder medicine unless you are told to by a doctor, even if you feel better.

Some medicines for bipolar disorder are not safe to take if you are pregnant. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Find out more

- [Treatment for bipolar disorder \(Mind\)](#)
- [NHS medicines A to Z: find your medicine](#)

Things you can do to help with bipolar disorder

If you have bipolar disorder, it's important to know what can trigger your high and low moods. This can include things like feeling stressed, not getting enough sleep or being too busy.

There are some things you can do that can help to keep your moods stable.

Do

- ✓ try to have a regular routine
- ✓ get plenty of sleep
- ✓ eat a healthy diet
- ✓ exercise regularly
- ✓ try to avoid and manage stress

Don't

- ✗ do not take recreational drugs
- ✗ do not smoke
- ✗ do not drink too much alcohol
- ✗ do not do shift work or work very long hours if you can avoid it
- ✗ do not fly at night or across time zones if you can avoid it
- ✗ do not drink lots of caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea or cola

Find out more

- [Self-management for bipolar disorder \(Mind\)](#).
- [NHS Better Health](#) – free tools and support to help you get active, quit smoking and drink less

If you have bipolar disorder, you will be supported by a mental health specialist or GP.


There are also national and local charities such as Bipolar UK, Mind and Rethink Mental Illness that offer information and support for anyone affected by bipolar disorder.

Support groups and forums

It can be helpful to speak to other people who have bipolar disorder.

There are many people offering support and sharing their stories in support groups, forums and on social media.

- [Local and specialist support groups \(Bipolar UK\)](#)
- [Online and local support groups \(Mind\)](#)
- [eCommunity online forum \(Bipolar UK\)](#)
- [Blogs sharing stories and experiences about living with bipolar disorder \(Bipolar UK\)](#)



Comments in forums and on social media are often based on personal experience and should not be taken as medical advice.

Support for family, friends and carers

If you care for someone who has bipolar disorder, you can get advice and support from charities.

- [Supporting someone with bipolar disorder \(Bipolar UK\)](#)
- [Helping someone else \(Mind\)](#)
- [Carers hub \(Rethink Mental Illness\)](#)

More information and advice

There are charities that offer advice and information for anyone affected by bipolar disorder.

- [Bipolar UK](#)
- [Mind: bipolar disorder](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness: bipolar disorder](#)

Causes of bipolar disorder

It's not known exactly what causes bipolar disorder.

You're more likely to have it if you have a parent, brother or sister who has bipolar disorder.

There are some things that can increase your chances of having it, including:

- childhood trauma or abuse
- a stressful event such as relationship problems, abuse, the death of someone close to you or money problems
- recreational drugs such as cannabis or cocaine
- a parasite called *toxoplasma gondii* (which causes [toxoplasmosis](#))

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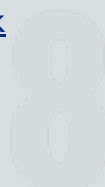
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