

Symptoms

Bipolar disorder

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Bipolar disorder is a serious mental illness and is considered to be a mood disorder. Early diagnosis is important so you can decide on the best form of treatment.

If you have bipolar disorder you will have extreme mood swings. These can range from extreme highs (mania) to extreme lows (depression).

Episodes of mania and depression often last for several weeks or months.

Depression

During a period of depression, your symptoms may include:

- feeling sad, hopeless or irritable most of the time
- lacking energy
- difficulty concentrating and remembering things
- loss of interest in everyday activities
- feelings of emptiness or worthlessness
- feelings of guilt and despair
- feeling pessimistic about everything
- self-doubt
- being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or illogical thinking
- lack of appetite
- difficulty sleeping
- waking up early
- suicidal thoughts

Mania

The manic phase may include:

- feeling very happy, elated or overjoyed
- talking very quickly
- feeling full of energy
- feeling self-important
- feeling full of great new ideas and having important plans
- being easily distracted
- being easily irritated or agitated
- being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or irrational thinking
- not feeling like sleeping
- not eating
- saying things that are out of character, often risky or harmful

During a manic phase, extreme positive feelings about yourself or your life could lead to risky actions or unwise decisions. These could have negative consequences for your finances, work or relationships.

Patterns of depression and mania

Patterns of depression and mania are not always the same.

For example, you may have episodes of depression more often than episodes of mania.

You may also have periods of 'normal' mood between episodes.

Some people may experience:

- rapid cycling – quick and repeated swings from a high to a low without having a 'normal' period in between
- mixed state – symptoms of depression and mania together, for example overactivity with a depressed mood

If your mood swings last a long time but are not severe, you may have cyclothymia. This is a mild form of bipolar disorder.

If you have an elevated mood or marked irritability without changes in thinking or sleep, this could be hypomania (less severe mania).

Living with bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder can be a condition of extremes. You may be unaware of changes in your mood and behaviour during phases of mania or hypomania.

After the episode is over, you may be upset by your out-of-character behaviour. But at the time, you

may believe other people are being negative or unhelpful.

Some people with bipolar disorder have more frequent and severe episodes than others. Staying in a job may be difficult. Relationships may also become strained. There's also an increased risk of suicide.

During episodes of mania and depression, you may have strange sensations. For example, hearing or smelling things that aren't there (hallucinations). There are treatments that can help with these experiences.

People with bipolar disorder may also believe things that seem irrational to other people (delusions). These are symptoms of [psychosis or a psychotic episode](#).

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