



# Patient education: Borderline personality disorder (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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## What is borderline personality disorder?

Borderline personality disorder, or "BPD," is a mental health disorder. People with this disorder have unstable relationships and extreme mood changes, such as sudden shifts to anger or sadness. They sometimes do things that seem extreme and can even be violent. Or they might act without thinking about the consequences.

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## What are the symptoms of BPD?

People with BPD often have:

- Unstable relationships
- Sudden shifts in how they see themselves or others
- Extreme mood changes, such as sudden feelings of rage, deep sadness, or total emptiness
- Problems with risk-taking – For example, they sometimes take illegal drugs or have unsafe sex, and they can be violent with themselves or others.
- Trouble thinking clearly or logically when overcome by emotion

Part of the reason that people with BPD have unstable relationships is that they tend to see people in their life as all good or all bad. For example, at one moment, they might feel close to a loved one, then at the next moment, they might feel disgusted by that person. People with BPD can also misunderstand the reactions of others. For instance, they might think a person who likes them actually hates them.

People with BPD often think about suicide. Roughly 1 in 10 people with the disorder actually kill themselves. For this reason, it's **very important** that people with BPD be treated by a professional who has experience with the disorder.

Many people with BPD have other mental health problems, too. For example, they might have depression, anxiety, eating disorders, or problems with drug or alcohol use.

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## Should I get help?

If you have the symptoms described above and they are affecting your life, talk to a therapist who has experience treating BPD. You can also talk to your doctor or nurse. They can help you find a therapist to talk to.

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## Get help right away if you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself!

Sometimes, people with BPD or depression think of hurting or killing themselves. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself, help is available:

- In the US, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
  - To speak to someone, call or text **988**.
  - To talk to someone online, go to [www.988lifeline.org/chat](https://www.988lifeline.org/chat).
- Call your doctor or nurse and tell them that it is an emergency.
- **Call for an ambulance** (in the US and Canada, **call 9-1-1**).
- Go to the emergency department at your local hospital.

If you think your partner might have BPD or depression, or if you are worried that they might hurt themselves, get them help right away.

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## Is there a test for BPD?

No. There is no test. But a mental health expert, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms, your relationships, and your experiences.

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## How is BPD treated?

The main treatment for BPD is psychotherapy. There are different types of psychotherapy that can help. In general, they all focus on helping you learn new ways of thinking and behaving, so that you have less extreme mood changes and feel more at ease.

Many people with BPD also benefit from medicines to help with mood changes, anger, and other symptoms.

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## What will my life be like?

Experts used to think that BPD was something you had for the rest of your life. New studies suggest that many people get much better over time. If you have BPD, it's important to seek help and follow through with treatment.

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