

Patient education: Bipolar disorder – Discharge instructions (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What are discharge instructions?

Discharge instructions are information about how to take care of yourself after getting medical care for a health problem.

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that causes extreme changes in mood and behavior. People sometimes call it "manic depression."

Bipolar disorder is caused by problems with chemicals in the brain called "neurotransmitters." Bipolar disorder can run in families.

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

Sometimes, people with bipolar disorder think of hurting or killing themselves. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself or someone else, 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.
- Call your doctor or nurse, and tell them it is an emergency.
- Call for an ambulance (in the US and Canada, call 9-1-1).
- Go to the emergency department at the nearest hospital.

How do I care for myself at home?

Ask the doctor or nurse what you should do when you go home. Make sure that you understand exactly what you need to do to care for yourself. Ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

You should also:

- Take your medicines exactly as your doctor tells you, even if you are feeling better.
 - Some people find it helpful to use reminders or a weekly pill box.
 - If you are having side effects, talk to your doctor. Many side effects go away after a few days or weeks of use.
- Talk to your doctor if you are using birth control. Some of the medicines to treat bipolar disorder can interact with birth control methods like pills, skin patches, or vaginal rings. This can make the birth control less effective. Consider using another form of birth control, such as an IUD, condom, or injection.
- Go to all of your appointments. This might include counseling sessions, support groups, or appointments for medical treatments.
- Work with a counselor to learn skills to help you live with your illness. This is an important part of your care and treatment. Your doctor might also suggest that your family take part in counseling with you.
- Take care of yourself:
 - Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
 - Try to get regular physical activity or exercise. Even gentle forms of activity, like walking, are good for your health.
 - Find healthy ways to handle stress, like talking to others or hobbies you enjoy. Relaxation exercises, meditation, and activities like yoga or tai chi can help you handle stress.
 - Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep every night.
- Speak with trusted family or friends about your illness and how they can help.

What follow-up care do I need?

Bipolar disorder needs to be watched closely. Your doctor or nurse will tell you when to make a follow-up appointment to check on your progress. Go to these appointments.

When should I call the doctor?

Call for emergency help right away (in the US and Canada, call 9-1-1) if you have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else.

Call your doctor or nurse for advice if:

- Your symptoms do not get better within 1 to 2 weeks.
- You are having trouble taking your medicine.
- Your medicine is causing side effects.

- You are not able to take care of yourself.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Bipolar disorder \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Depression in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Bipolar disorder \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Depression in adults \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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