

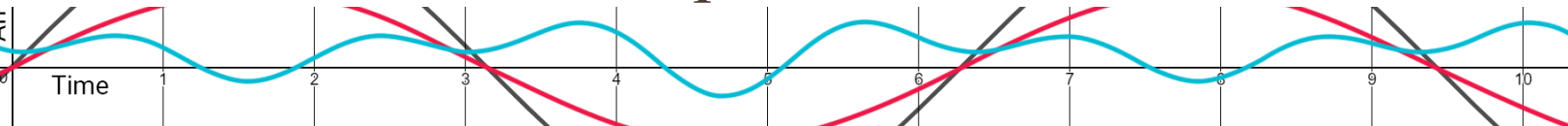


# Bipolar Disorders

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## What Are Bipolar Disorders?



Moods are a part of life. Normal moods have a wide range of intensities and shifts. Intense moods or mood "swings" are only considered to be clinically significant if they cause the sufferer to have problems in their relationships, work, or school, or if the person experiencing them finds them troubling. Bipolar disorder is a lifelong disorder with serious highs and lows, and these last for a significant length of time. Brief, intense moods, or a pattern of being generally over-reactive, is more likely to be accounted for by another disorder or learned behavior.

Bipolar I disorder is a serious condition that involves major lows of depression and highs, called mania. True bipolar disorder mood swings last a long time- days, weeks, or even months.

During the highs, called manias, people typically lose touch with reality altogether, feeling "on top of the world," getting into arguments, going without sleep, and possibly even having delusions or hallucinations. These highs are dangerous, as the person will lose the inability to keep themselves safe and take dangerous risks.

The lows, which are true depressions, involve weeks to months of poor focus, sadness, feeling worthless or hopeless, and an inability to perform well at school, work, or home. Some may become suicidal.

There is a third mood state, called a mixed state, which involves the hopelessness or sadness of depression and the energy and possible loss of reality-testing of mania. A mixed state is exceptionally dangerous, as the person has the energy and ability to act on their impulses.

Bipolar II disorder is a subtype of bipolar disorder. In Bipolar II a person experiences major depressions, but instead of "classic" manias described above, there are hypomanias, comprised of periods of several days to weeks of increased energy, irritability, sexual appetite, increased spending, and elated mood, but do not lose contact with reality.

Cyclothymia involves mood changes that also last days to weeks, including hypomania, but the depression is milder. Usually the hypomanic periods are less severe than in Bipolar II and last a few days.

All bipolar disorders, however, involve mood states with distinct phases. Erratic behavior, unpredictable moods, and chronic instability is more likely to be caused by another problem.

Personality disorders are characterized by what we refer to as a "characteristic way of being." This means that the behaviors, moods, and reactions happen everywhere- at home, work, school, and in all types of relationships. They also must be present for years at a time.

Certain personality disorders, such as Antisocial, Histrionic, and Borderline personality disorders, are characterized by rapid changes in mood and intense displays of affect. These disorders can account for statements such as, "I just flip out for no reason," or, "They turn on dime suddenly they are really angry or really depressed or really excited for no reason." This is what's known as "affective instability" in professional language. This can also occur in persons with certain TBIs or PTSD.

Substance abuse is frequently overlooked as a cause of mood disturbances. This may be because the substance use is considered to be "normal" or "not so bad," or because the drinking or drug use doesn't occur every day. This is problematic, as binge use of alcohol or drugs tends to create an impression of chaotic mood and personality changes more than a consistent daily-use pattern does. Sobriety of several months is required to rule out substance-induced mood disorders, as the biochemical changes to the brain caused by addiction can take that long to begin to repair.

It is vital that if you, or someone you know, is troubled by mood disturbances, that you seek out professional diagnosis from a therapist or counselor. Whether a genuine disorder or simply a lack of mood management skills, professional diagnosis and treatment can prevent relationship disruption and difficulties with work and school.

## Who Is At Risk?

*\* People with family members with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (10 times the risk) \*Bipolar disorder is seen more frequently in persons of middle or high income \* Having been separated, divorced, or widowed \* While onset can occur any time, the most frequent age windows are 18-22 and late 60s-early 70s \*Sleep deprivation, erratic schedules, substance use all raise risk of mania \* Starting or raising an antidepressant may trigger mania in vulnerable persons*

# Resources

If you are looking for support for yourself or a loved one, here are some places to try.

**Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance.** National group providing education, support, & help to persons with mood disorders & their families. <https://www.dbsalliance.org/support/>

**Balanced Mind Parent Network.** Support, education, and assistance for parents of persons with mood disorders. <https://www.balancedmindparentnetwork.org/>

[www.dbsalliance.org/support/for-friends-family/for-parents/balanced-mind-parent-network/](http://www.dbsalliance.org/support/for-friends-family/for-parents/balanced-mind-parent-network/)

**Recovery Learning Center.** A Western Mass peer support program with extensive offerings & information. <https://www.westernmassrlc.org/>

**Clubhouses.** A Clubhouse is a community-based membership organization designed to support people living with mental illness. Usually open daily from morning to evening, and free. <https://www.clubhouse-intl.org/>

[clubhouse-intl.org/](http://clubhouse-intl.org/)

**The Recover Project.** Supports for persons in recovery from substance abuse and/or mental health issues by others with lived experience. Not a 12-step model. <http://recoverproject.org/>

**NAMI.** A national organization offering information and resources regarding mental health. <https://www.nami.org/>



## Learn More....

If you are interested in learning more about bipolar disorder, these books may be helpful. Find them at your library, local store, or online.

David J. Miklowitz. *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide, Third Edition: What You and Your Family Need to Know Third Edition.*

Kay Redfield Jamison. *An Unquiet Mind.*

Monica Ramirez Basco. *The Bipolar Workbook, Second Edition: Tools for Controlling Your Mood Swings Second Edition.*

Francis Mark Mondimore, MD. *Bipolar Disorder: A Guide for Patients and Families (A Johns Hopkins Press Health Book) third edition.*

William R. Marchand, MD. *Mindfulness for Bipolar Disorder: How Mindfulness and Neuroscience Can Help You Manage Your Bipolar Symptoms.*