Bipolar disorder: GP information sheet

Bipolar disorder involves changes in mood and energy that can feel bigger than everyday ups and downs. People may move through periods of low mood and periods of high energy, with steadier times in between. Support is available, and every person's path is their own.

About this sheet. We have written this sheet as psychologists, in the hope that GPs may find some of it useful. It offers general information only and is not a clinical tool.

How it may show up in everyday life

Some people, or the people close to them, may notice things like these. They can look quite different from one person to the next.

Low periods

- Energy and interest might drop away
- Sleep could change
- Everyday tasks may feel heavy

High periods

- Energy might feel boundless
- Sleep may seem less necessary
- Ideas could flow very quickly

At work or study

- Productivity might come in bursts
- Some weeks may feel much harder than others
- Plans could shift quickly

In relationships

- Loved ones might notice changes before the person does
- Relationships could feel strained at times
- Family may want to understand more

Daily rhythms

- Sleep patterns might be a helpful early sign of change
- Routines could feel easier in steadier times
- Stress may affect mood

Over time

- Some people may only make sense of patterns looking back
- Experiences can be different for each person
- Steadier times are part of the picture too

What the person might be bringing

People may have experienced a lot of change and uncertainty. They might feel embarrassed about things that happened during high or low times, or worried about how they will be seen.

A warm, curious conversation may help it feel safer to talk. Feeling heard can be a meaningful first step.

What GPs already do well

Opening gently

GPs are often the first person someone feels able to talk to. A gentle opening can help people share things they may not have said out loud before.

Listening to the story

GPs often know the person, and sometimes their family, over many years. That wider view of someone's life can be very valuable.

A steady point of contact

As people explore their options, the GP can remain a familiar, steady presence, working alongside other professionals.

Seeing the whole person

GPs often hold the bigger picture of someone's health and wellbeing, which can help people feel understood.

What psychology may offer

Understanding

- Time to make sense of experiences
- Exploring patterns in mood and energy
- Recognising strengths as well as challenges
- Space to talk about stress or worry

Practical and family support

- Ideas for routines and sleep
- Planning for changes in mood
- Support for partners and families
- Working alongside the GP and other professionals

Everyday things some people find helpful

These are simply possibilities. What helps one person may not suit another.

- Regular sleep and wake times
- Keeping a simple mood diary
- Steady daily routines
- Gentle movement
- Noticing early signs of change
- Staying connected with trusted people

Trusted Australian resources

Black Dog Institute blackdoginstitute.org.au

SANE sane.org

Beyond Blue beyondblue.org.au

Referring to Strategic Psychology

Our psychologists work with children, adolescents and adults. If a client would like to see one of our team, they can call us on 02 6262 6157 or visit strategicpsychology.com.au. Medicare rebates may be available with a GP referral.

This sheet offers general information for GPs to consider. It does not replace clinical judgement.