

Bipolar disorder tip sheet

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a long term mental health condition involving bigger changes in mood, energy, thinking and behaviour than usual. These can include periods of depression (lows) and periods of mania or hypomania (highs). It often first appears in the late teens or early adulthood. With treatment and support, many people living with bipolar disorder lead full and meaningful lives.

Common signs

Experiences differ from person to person. During a high (mania or hypomania), some people notice:

- Feeling unusually high, or very irritable
- Needing much less sleep
- Racing thoughts and fast speech
- Being very easily distracted
- Very high confidence or big plans
- Doing risky or impulsive things, such as spending

During a low (depression), some people feel sad or hopeless, lose interest in things, or have low energy.

Things that may help

Some people find these ideas helpful alongside the support of their doctor and treating team.

Your treatment plan

Treatment is something to work out with your doctor. Many people find it helpful to talk with their doctor about any questions, side effects or changes.

Sleep

Changes in sleep can be an early sign of a high or a low for some people. A regular bedtime and wake time, and less caffeine later in the day, may help.

Early warning signs

Many people come to recognise their own early signs, such as sleeping less or feeling more energised. A mood diary or app may help with noticing them.

A wellness plan

Some people write down their warning signs, who they would like to contact and what helps, and share it with people they trust and their treating team.

Stress

Stress can sometimes affect mood. Some people find it helps to take one thing at a time and make room for relaxing activities.

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and other drugs can affect mood and sleep and may interact with medication. Your doctor can talk with you about this.

Things that **may help** (continued)

Staying connected

Keeping in touch with family and friends can help, including at times when it feels harder. Some people find peer support from others who understand helpful.

Physical health

Regular check ups, being active and eating well can all support overall health.

When to get **more support**

If things are becoming unmanageable and affecting your social, family, work or study life, you may want to see your GP or a psychologist. You do not need to wait until things feel serious to reach out.

If you have questions about bipolar disorder, a GP can be a good place to start. They can talk with you about your health and options for support, which may include a psychiatrist or psychologist. Many people find it helpful to be in touch with their GP or treating team when they notice early warning signs. Family and friends who support someone can look after their own wellbeing too.

Benefits of **seeking support**

- Talking with a GP or psychologist may help you make sense of what is happening.
- Support might help you feel less alone with what you are going through.
- A psychologist could offer new ways of coping that suit you.
- Ongoing support may help you notice changes in mood and plan for them.

Need help **right now?**

If you or someone else is in danger or thinking about suicide, please reach out now.

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Emergency services, if life is in danger

13 11 14

Lifeline crisis support, 24 hours, 7 days

13 92 76

13YARN, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7

Trusted **Australian resources**

SANE Australia sane.org | 1800 187 263

Black Dog Institute blackdoginstitute.org.au

healthdirect healthdirect.gov.au | 1800 022 222

This tip sheet offers general information only and does not replace advice from your GP, psychologist or other health professional.