

Living with bipolar I disorder



The constantly changing moods and feelings that come with bipolar I disorder can have a big effect on a person's everyday life. Holding down a job can be hard, and relationships with partners and friends can become strained as the person's personality shifts from one extreme to the other.

However, with the right care and treatment, people with bipolar I disorder can lead relatively full and normal lives. Here are some things people with bipolar can do to feel better and make their lives as normal as possible.

DO:

- **Accept that bipolar I disorder is a disease:** Bipolar I disorder is a disease and no matter what some people do, they may still have episodes. Understanding and accepting that episodes can simply happen is the first step towards feeling better
- **Take medication(s), even if feeling normal or if the effects are not felt straight away:** Medication helps to control symptoms and to prevent episodes – even if episodes still happen, taking medication regularly and properly can make them less serious and happen less often. Taking medication at the same time each day helps to build up a routine, making it easier to remember to take treatment. It is very important to take medications every day to stop bipolar I disorder getting worse over time. If there are side effects, a psychiatrist should be contacted, but medication should not be stopped unless specifically instructed by a psychiatrist or doctor.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle:** Sleeping regularly (going to bed and waking at the same time every day, no napping for more than 30 minutes), eating a balanced diet (rich in fresh vegetables, fruits and fish), avoiding excessive drinking and taking drugs, taking regular exercise (at least 3 hours a week; if not sport then brisk walks), getting daily exposure to sunlight (being outside for at least half an hour a day), and generally living a regular and organised lifestyle can help prevent the symptoms of bipolar I disorder.
- **Learn to recognise warning signs:** Warning signs are mild symptoms that many people feel before having an episode. Every person has their own set of warning signs unique to them. A physician should be able to help with what symptoms to look out for.
- **Let other people help:** Although having an independent view on life is positive, it's important that a person has someone they can trust like a friend or family member if they need help, or for when things get difficult. Other people can help with things like waking a person up in the morning, reminding them about when to take medications, or spotting changes in behaviour which could signal that an episode is about to happen (warning signs).
- **Maintain relationships with other people:** Regularly socialising with other people can make people feel better and their life feel more normal. Working is a good way of doing this, but if that's not possible, being involved in hobbies, sports and activities like talking and helping others with the disorder can also be a good thing.
- **Be aware of the effects of bipolar I disorder on family:** Bipolar I disorder can have a big effect on the family of a person with the condition, especially children. It's important to try to talk about it openly, so that close relatives realise bipolar I disorder is a problem beyond that person's control. Taking the family to talk regularly with a counsellor or support group can help.

DON'T:

- **Blame yourself:** Bipolar I disorder is a disease and the way it makes you feel is beyond your control. What's important is to take responsibility for it by taking medication and understanding the things that can make the disease better or worse.
- **Take drugs:** Drugs have been linked to triggering episodes and can also stop medication from working. A psychiatrist can help with finding ways to deal with drugs and drug taking.
- **Drink** too much alcohol (No more than 3-4 units per day for a man or 2-3 for a woman)¹
- **Trivialise mania:** Some of the symptoms of mania, like feeling full of energy and self-important, can be addictive. It's important to remember that mania is not healthy, and to take steps towards controlling it.



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Reference:
1. UK Lower Risk Guidelines.
Available at <http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/what-is-alcohol/daily-guidelines>.
Accessed January 2015.

