



BIPOLAR DISORDER: What is it?

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Bipolar disorder, sometimes called manic depression, is a disorienting condition that causes extreme shifts in mood. Like riding a slow-motion roller coaster, patients may spend weeks feeling like they're on top of the world before plunging into a relentless depression. The length of each high and low varies greatly from person to person. In any given year, bipolar disorder affects more than 2% of adults.

Depressive Phase Symptoms

Without treatment, a person with bipolar disorder may experience intense episodes of depression. Symptoms include sadness, anxiety, loss of energy, hopelessness, and difficulty concentrating. Patients may lose interest in activities that were once pleasurable. They may gain or lose weight, sleep too much or too little, and contemplate suicide.

Manic Phase Symptoms

During a manic phase, patients tend to feel euphoric and may believe they can accomplish anything. This can result in inflated self-esteem, agitation, reduced need for sleep, being more talkative, being easily distracted, and a sense of racing thoughts. Reckless behaviors, including spending sprees, sexual indiscretions, fast driving, and substance abuse, are common. Having three or more of these symptoms nearly every day for a week may indicate a manic episode.

Bipolar 1 vs. Bipolar 2

People with bipolar I disorder have manic episodes or mixed episodes and often have one or more depressive episodes. People with bipolar II have major depressive episodes with less severe mania; they experience hypomania, a condition that is less intense than mania or lasting less than a week. Patients may seem like the "life of the party" -- full of charm and humor. They may feel and function fine, even if family and friends can see the mood swing. However, hypomania can lead to mania or depression.

Mixed Episode

People with mixed episode experience depression and mania at the same time. This leads to unpredictable behavior, such as sadness while doing a favorite activity or feeling very energetic. It's more common in people who develop bipolar disorder at a young age, particularly during adolescence. But some estimates suggest up to 70% of bipolar patients experience mixed episodes.

Cause of Bipolar Disorder

Doctors aren't exactly sure what causes bipolar disorder. A leading theory is that brain chemicals fluctuate abnormally. When levels of certain chemicals become too high, the patient develops mania. When levels drop too low, depression may result.

Biopolar Disorder: Who's at Risk?

Bipolar disorder affects males and females equally. In most cases, the onset of symptoms is between 15 and 30 years old. People are at higher risk if a family member has been diagnosed, especially if it's a first degree relative, but doctors don't think the disorder kicks in based on genetics alone. A stressful event, drug abuse, or other unknown factor may trigger the cycle of ups and downs.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION *Continued*

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and show very little energy or emotion.

- **Foot on the gas and brake.** A tense and frozen stress response. You "freeze" under pressure and can't do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you're extremely agitated.

Stress interferes with the ability to resolve conflict by limiting your ability to:

- Accurately read another person's nonverbal communication.
- Hear what someone is really saying.
- Be aware of your own feelings.
- Be in touch with your deep-rooted needs.
- Communicate your needs clearly.

Is stress a problem for you?

You may be so used to being stressed that you're not even aware you are stressed. Stress may be a problem in your life if you identify with the following:

- You often feel tense or tight somewhere in your body.
- You're not aware of movement in your chest or stomach when you breathe.
- Conflict absorbs your time and attention.

Emotional Awareness: The second core conflict resolution skill

Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others. If you don't know how you feel or why you feel that way, you won't be able to communicate effectively or smooth over disagreements. Although knowing your own feelings may seem simple, many people ignore or try to sedate strong emotions like anger, sadness, and fear. But your ability to handle conflict depends on being connected to these feelings. If you're afraid of strong emotions or if you insist on finding solutions that are strictly rational, your ability to face and resolve differences will be impaired.

Why emotional awareness is a key factor in resolving conflict.

Emotional awareness — consciousness of your moment-to-moment emotional experience — and the ability to manage all of your feelings appropriately is the basis of a communication process that can resolve conflict.

Emotional awareness helps you:

- Understand what's really troubling other people
- Understand yourself, including what is really troubling you
- Stay motivated until the conflict is resolved
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Attract and influence others

Nonverbal Communication plays a big role in conflict resolution

The most important information exchanged during conflicts and arguments is often communicated nonverbally. Nonverbal communication is conveyed by emotionally-driven facial expressions, posture, gesture, pace, tone and intensity of voice.

The most important communication is wordless.

When people are upset, the words they use rarely convey the issues and needs at the heart of the problem. When we listen for what is felt as well as said, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us.

When you're in the middle of a conflict, paying close attention to the other person's nonverbal signals may help you figure out what the other person is really saying, respond in a way that builds trust, and get to the root of the problem. Simple nonverbal signals such as a calm tone of voice, a reassuring touch, or an interested or concerned facial expression can go a long way toward relaxing a tense exchange.

Your ability to accurately read another person depends on your own emotional awareness. The more aware you are of your own emotions, the easier it will be for you to pick up on the wordless clues that reveal what others are feeling.

Humor, judiciously used, can effectively defuse conflict.

Once stress and emotion are brought into balance your capacity for joy, pleasure and playfulness is unleashed. Joy is a deceptively powerful resource. Studies show that you can surmount adversity, as long as you continue to have moments of joy. Humor plays a similar role when the challenge you're facing is conflict.

You can avoid many confrontations and resolve arguments and disagreements by communicating in a playful or humorous way. Humor can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without creating a flap. However, it's important that you laugh with the other person, not at them. When humor and play is used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can actually become an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy.

Tips for managing & resolving conflict

- Listen for what is felt as well as said.
- Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being Right".
- Focus on the present.
- Pick your battles.
- Be willing to forgive.
- Know when to let something go.



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Bipolar Disorder and Daily Life

Bipolar disorder can disrupt your goals at work and at home. In one survey, 88% of patients said the illness took a toll on their careers. The unpredictable mood swings can drive a wedge between patients and their co-workers or loved ones. In particular, the manic phase may scare off friends and family. People with bipolar disorder also have a higher risk of developing anxiety disorders.

Bipolar Disorder and Substance Abuse

About 60% of people with bipolar disorder have trouble with drugs or alcohol. Patients may drink or abuse drugs to relieve the uncomfortable symptoms of their mood swings—Especially common during the reckless manic phase.



Diagnosing Bipolar Disorder

A crucial step in diagnosing bipolar disorder is to rule out other possible causes of extreme mood swings. These may include brain infection or other neurological disorders, substance abuse, thyroid problem, HIV, ADHD, side effects of certain medications, or other psychiatric disorders. There is no lab test for bipolar disorder. A psychiatrist usually makes the diagnosis based on a careful history and evaluation of the patient's mood and other symptoms.

Lifestyle Tips for Bipolar Disorder

Establishing firm routines can help manage bipolar disorder. Routines should include sufficient sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Because alcohol and recreational drugs can worsen the symptoms, these should be avoided. Patients should also learn to identify their personal early warning signs of mania and depression. This will allow them to get help before an episode spins out of control.

Educating Friends and Family

Friends and family may not understand bipolar disorder at first. They may become frustrated with the depressive episodes and frightened by the manic states. If patients make the effort to explain the illness and how it affects them, loved ones may become more compassionate. Having a solid support system can help people with bipolar disorder feel less isolated and more motivated to manage their condition.

When Someone Needs Help

Many people with bipolar disorder don't realize they have a problem or avoid getting help. If you're concerned about a friend or family member, here are a few tips for broaching the subject. Point out that millions of Americans have bipolar disorder, and that it is a treatable illness – not a personality flaw. There is a medical explanation for the extreme mood swings, and effective treatments are available.



MENTAL HEALTH

CELEBRITIES with MOOD DISORDERS

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The **creative** curse

Depression may have been dubbed the "common cold of mental health," but the mental health buzzword these days is bipolar disorder, possibly because it's often associated with creativity, verve, and charisma. Sometimes called manic depression, the disorder affects about 2.5% of the adult U.S. population and can cause extreme mood changes—from manic episodes of very high energy to extreme lows of depression.

Bipolar disorder is difficult to diagnose, even for the experts; that may explain why the media feel free to invoke the disorder in the wake of a celebrity's erratic behavior or substance abuse. While some celebs have been outspoken about their struggles with bipolar disorder, others allude mysteriously to manic depression. Here, see which celebrities, past and present, have been linked to bipolar disorder.



Britney Spears

While the pop princess, 28, kept quiet about possible mental health problems, speculation and rumors about a possible bipolar diagnosis swirled around Spears since the infamous shaved-head photos surfaced in 2007. A parade of psychiatrists and psychologists—none of whom actually treated Spears, mind you—"diagnosed" her as bipolar in various media outlets.



Marilyn Monroe

Many of the questions surrounding the actress's life and death are still unanswered—and are likely to remain that way. But Marilyn Monroe: The Final Days, a 2001 documentary, shed some light on her drug use and mental health.

"We knew that she was a manic depressive," Monroe's physician, Hyman Engelberg, MD, says in the film. "That always meant that there were emotional problems and that she could have big swings in her moods."



Catherine Zeta-Jones

"There is no need to suffer silently and there is no shame in seeking help," she said.

Catherine Zeta-Jones checked herself into a mental-health facility in 2011 to treat her bipolar II disorder, which has longer periods of depression and shorter, milder manic episodes than bipolar I.



Demi Lovato

"I feel like I am in control now."

It wasn't until she entered a treatment center for her struggles with anorexia, bulimia, and cutting that teen pop star Demi Lovato found out she had bipolar disorder. The Disney darling has since completed treatment and will continue to see doctors at home in L.A., but says, "I feel like I am in control now."



Sinead O'Connor

The pop star of the eighties and nineties, notorious for her shaved head, openly discussed her mental illness on The Oprah Winfrey Show in 2007. She said she was diagnosed as bipolar at age 37, after attempting to kill herself on her 33rd birthday. O'Connor, now 43, said she takes antidepressants and mood stabilizers. "Anything is an improvement when you've been in desolation," O'Connor told Winfrey of the meds, but "it doesn't mean you don't have lumps and bumps."

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