

# TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR BIPOLAR DISORDER

Getting treatment may help people with bipolar disorder live with fewer extreme ups and downs. Learn more about your treatment options below, so you'll be ready to discuss what's right for you at your next appointment with your healthcare provider.

## WHAT ARE POSSIBLE TREATMENT OPTIONS?

An appropriate treatment plan can help most people diagnosed bipolar disorder to help control their symptoms and a treatment plan may include various options such as the use of **medication** and **talk therapy**. Although some healthcare providers do both, some patients build an integrated care team, with one provider who is responsible for medication management and another provider who provides talk therapy. You and your healthcare provider should discuss the various options and decide what treatment approach might work best for you.

### MEDICATION

Many people with bipolar disorder can see improvement in their symptoms by taking medication. These medications can help you get control of your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and stabilize your mood. There are many different types of medications available for bipolar disorder, so your healthcare provider might need you to try a few different options before they can identify what works best for you. Everyone responds to medications differently.

Keep in mind that the medications for bipolar disorder are not like the medications you take for a headache: you most likely won't feel the effects in a few hours or even in a few days. Instead, most medications for bipolar disorder will take several weeks before you notice any effects.

You'll also need to continue taking your medication as prescribed even after you feel better. Your healthcare provider will help determine the appropriate medication schedule for you.

Many medications can have undesirable side effects. Some of these are minor and may go away on their own, while others may be more serious. **If a side effect continues to bother you, make sure to discuss it with your healthcare provider rather than stopping the medication on your own.** Your doctor may be able to suggest things that may help, such as changing the time of day you take the medication, adjusting your dose, or trying a different medication.

Some patients worry that taking medication is "the easy way out," while other patients worry medication will change their personality or take away their creativity. In reality, taking medication can be a healthy choice. Medications can help to bring your brain's chemistry back into balance which can help improve your condition.

People with bipolar disorder can be at a greater risk for suicide. If you are thinking about suicide or making a plan, the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** network is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week across the United States.

- **English:** 1-800-273-8255
- **Para Español:** 1-888-628-9454
- **For deaf and hard of hearing:** 1-800-799-4889
- **Veterans crisis line:** 1-800-273-8255

This handout is intended for your education and does not replace proper medical care. Please talk to your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns you might have.

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For text messaging, text the word "HOME" to 741741. The **Crisis Text Line** connects you to trained crisis counselors for free 24/7 support.

## WHAT ARE MY TREATMENT OPTIONS?

### TALK THERAPY

Many people with bipolar disorder also engage in talk therapy, either with their healthcare provider or another professional therapist. Research has shown that talk therapy can help individuals manage their symptoms on a day-to-day basis and reduce their likelihood of relapse.

While there are many different approaches to talk therapy, they all share the same treatment goals: to help patients understand more about their condition, learn to recognize triggers and warning signs, and develop coping strategies for when symptoms do develop. Some approaches that are commonly used in bipolar disorder include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and interpersonal and social rhythm therapy (IPSRT). Some types of therapy occur one-on-one, while other types occur in a group-based format. Therapy can be offered in person or online and may be covered by your health insurance.

No matter what type of talk therapy you choose, it is important that you find a therapist who you can trust and a setting in which you feel comfortable. When meeting with a therapist for the first time, consider bringing a list of questions you'd like answered and goals you have for treatment. Ask your healthcare provider for more information about how to find a therapist in your local area.

“What I would say to anyone going through a similar situation is to not let bipolar disorder—or any other mental disorder—define you. Don’t let what others think they know about it get to you. Focus on your recovery and stay on track with your medication and therapy... When you look back at all that you’ve been through, you will look at yourself as a warrior.”

– Personal story from a person with bipolar disorder.

[www.nami.org/Personal-Stories/  
Focus-on-Your-Recovery](http://www.nami.org/Personal-Stories/Focus-on-Your-Recovery)

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## TIPS FOR REMEMBERING TO TAKE YOUR MEDICATION

Your healthcare provider has prescribed medication to help control the symptoms of bipolar disorder you experience. Following your provider's instructions and taking your medication each day is an essential part of your treatment plan. Here are some simple tips to consider trying and help make sure you don't miss a single dose!



**Set an alarm.** Use your phone or other electronic device to set a reminder for the same time each day. Make sure to pick a time when you usually have access to your prescription(s).



**Use a weekly pill organizer.** Having trouble remembering if you took your medication(s) that morning? Putting your medication in a weekly pillbox with compartments for each day can help prevent missing or accidentally doubling doses.



**Create a daily routine.** Combine taking your medication with a task or activity that you already do each day, like brushing your teeth.



**Sign up for auto-refills.** Most patients are given a 30-day supply of their medication(s). Enrolling in your pharmacy's auto-refill program can help make sure you don't run out unexpectedly. These programs will often send a notification when it's time to pick up your medication(s).



**Enlist someone to help.** You don't have to do this alone. Ask a family member or loved one to help you remember to take your medication.

## FINDING THE RIGHT THERAPIST

Finding the right therapist can be tricky, but it's worth the time and effort. Remember that it's okay if you don't click with the first therapist you meet. A good therapist will understand if you decide to see someone else—they just want you to get the help you need! Here are some questions to consider when starting your search:

## TREATING THE WHOLE YOU

The treatment plan that you develop with your healthcare provider should help address all aspects of your health. Be sure to share your entire medical history with your provider, including any other conditions you may have or those that run in your family. This will help your healthcare provider develop a comprehensive treatment approach that's tailored to you.



Do I feel more comfortable speaking with someone of a specific gender?



Do I feel more comfortable with a younger or older therapist?



Does the therapist accept my insurance?



Is the therapist's office conveniently located? Can I get there easily?



Is the therapist available in between appointments and during off-hours, if I am in crisis?



What is the therapist's specialty?



Has this person worked with patients with bipolar disorder before?