

BIPOLAR DISORDER



The Mecca of Black Wellness



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We often hear people use the term “Bipolar Disorder” incorrectly in conversations or on television to explain any shift in mood or behaviors, but what do we really know about Bipolar Disorder? While it is common to think that we may be struggling with our mood because we experience good days and bad days and sometimes feel “moody,” these feelings may be typical ups and downs, which is normal.

This fact sheet is for anyone who is interested in learning more about Bipolar Disorder and/or for those who may be wondering if they or someone they know are struggling with symptoms of Bipolar Disorder. We recommend that you take a few moments to review this fact sheet and consult with a licensed mental health professional for an accurate assessment and diagnosis.

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar Disorder is a lifelong mental health condition that affects the brain. Individuals with Bipolar Disorder may experience severe mood swings where their emotions, energy, activity, and sleep drastically fluctuate between two phases that are often referred to as the “highs” (manic phase) and the “lows” (depressive phase).

Bipolar Disorder is a severe and persistent mental illness that affects approximately 2.6% of the U.S. Population ⁽¹⁾. Individuals with Bipolar Disorder who do not seek treatment are at risk for increased drug use, legal and financial problems, suicidal ideation and attempts, and problems with relationships work and/or school performance ⁽²⁾. Unfortunately, Black/African Americans, are less likely to receive mental health treatment ⁽³⁾ due to various reasons, including mistrust of health professionals, limited access to treatment, cultural barriers, and the stigma associated with mental health and illnesses ⁽⁴⁾.

Each individual experiences changes or shifts in their mood differently. Review the list of Bipolar symptoms and think about yourself. If you think that you had or are experiencing manic and/or depressive episodes, you may be struggling with Bipolar Disorder.

(1) National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2017). Bipolar Disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Bipolar-Disorder>

(2) Mayo Clinic (2018). Bipolar Disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355955>

(3) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (2013). National healthcare disparities report. Retrieved from <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhdr13/chap2-txt.html#fig231>

(4) Mental Health America. (2019). Black and African American Communities and Mental Health. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/african-american-mental-health>

Manic and Depressive Phases (or Moods of Bipolar Disorder)

The Highs (Manic Phase)

- Irritable, agitated or feeling extremely happy
- Sleeping less hours than normal, yet having a lot of energy
- Engaging in risky behaviors (reckless sex, spending a lot of money)
- Feeling unstoppable
- Racing thoughts or talking a lot
- Focused on completing a lot of goals and projects at one time

The Lows (Depressive Phase)

- Feeling sad or down
- Loss of interest in things you previously enjoyed (getting your hair or nails done, getting a haircut, playing sports)
- Eating more or less, or losing weight, without trying
- Changes in your sleep patterns (sleeping less or more than usual)
- Feeling bad about yourself or blaming yourself for things that happened
- Difficulty focusing or making decisions
- Thoughts of hurting yourself

Types of Bipolar Disorder

There are different types of Bipolar Disorder, which can involve both manic and depressive symptoms. Please read more to learn about the different types of Bipolar Disorder below.

Bipolar 1 – A diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder is given to individuals who have had at least one manic episode. During a manic episode, an individual's symptoms may be so severe that they require hospitalization

Bipolar 2 – A diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder is given to individuals who have had at least one depressive episode, lasting two weeks or longer and who have experienced hypomanic symptoms (i.e., symptoms that are less intense than a manic episode that does not require hospitalization).

Cyclothymia – A diagnosis of Cyclothymia is given to individuals who experience shifts in mood between short periods of mild depression and hypomania.

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR BIPOLAR DISORDER

Medication: It is important to seek a licensed mental health provider to help you understand your symptoms of Bipolar Disorder and to determine if medication is a recommended component of your treatment. Identifying the best medication or combination of medications can be a complex process because each person experiences Bipolar Disorder differently. For example, individuals may show variations in the changes or shifts in their mood (e.g., some people may experience more symptoms of mania while others experience more depressive symptoms). As such, your provider will work closely with you to understand your symptoms and to determine the best medication(s) for you. Overall, medications can be beneficial in helping to balance your mood and to minimize the severe shifts in the highs and lows of your mood. Providers who typically prescribe medications may include a psychiatrist, an advanced practice nurse, or a primary care physician.

Medications may include:

- Mood stabilizers
- Antipsychotics
- Antidepressants
- Antidepressant- Antipsychotic
- Anti-anxiety medications

Reminder: Medications may take up to 4-6 weeks before you start noticing a change in your mood. In addition, some medications may cause side effects. As such, it is important to remember that it may take time and trial and error to find the right medication for you.

Therapy: Therapy are effective treatment options to help manage symptoms of Bipolar Disorder. This includes individual therapy, family therapy, and group therapy.

Types of Therapy Used to Treat Bipolar Disorder may include:

- **Cognitive Behavior Therapy** – Is a type of psychotherapy that can help individuals manage their thoughts, perceptions, and behavior and how their behavior impacts others
- **Family Therapy** – Helps the family understand the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder and warning signs of relapse and teaches skills associated with communication, stress management, and problem solving
- **Support Groups** – Provide an opportunity to share experiences, discuss coping skills, and offer hope to other group members

Intensive Treatment: More intensive treatment options are most beneficial for individuals with Bipolar Disorder who are at risk for harming themselves or others. This may occur when they are hearing or seeing things that others cannot, or when the medication needs to be adjusted

Intensive treatments may include:

- Inpatient Hospitalization
- Intensive Outpatient Program

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Resources During Crisis or Distress

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Visit, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or dial 1-888-628-9454 to speak to someone.

The Veterans Crisis Line

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Responders will work with you to help you get through any personal crisis, even if that crisis does not involve thoughts of suicide. Dial 1-800-273-8255 and (Press 1) to talk to someone now. A confidential chat is also available online or through text. To [chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx) online (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx>) or send a text to 838255 to receive confidential support anonymously.

To Learn More About Bipolar Disorder

Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355955>

National Institute of Mental Health

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>

National Alliance on Mental Illness

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Bipolar-Disorder>

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