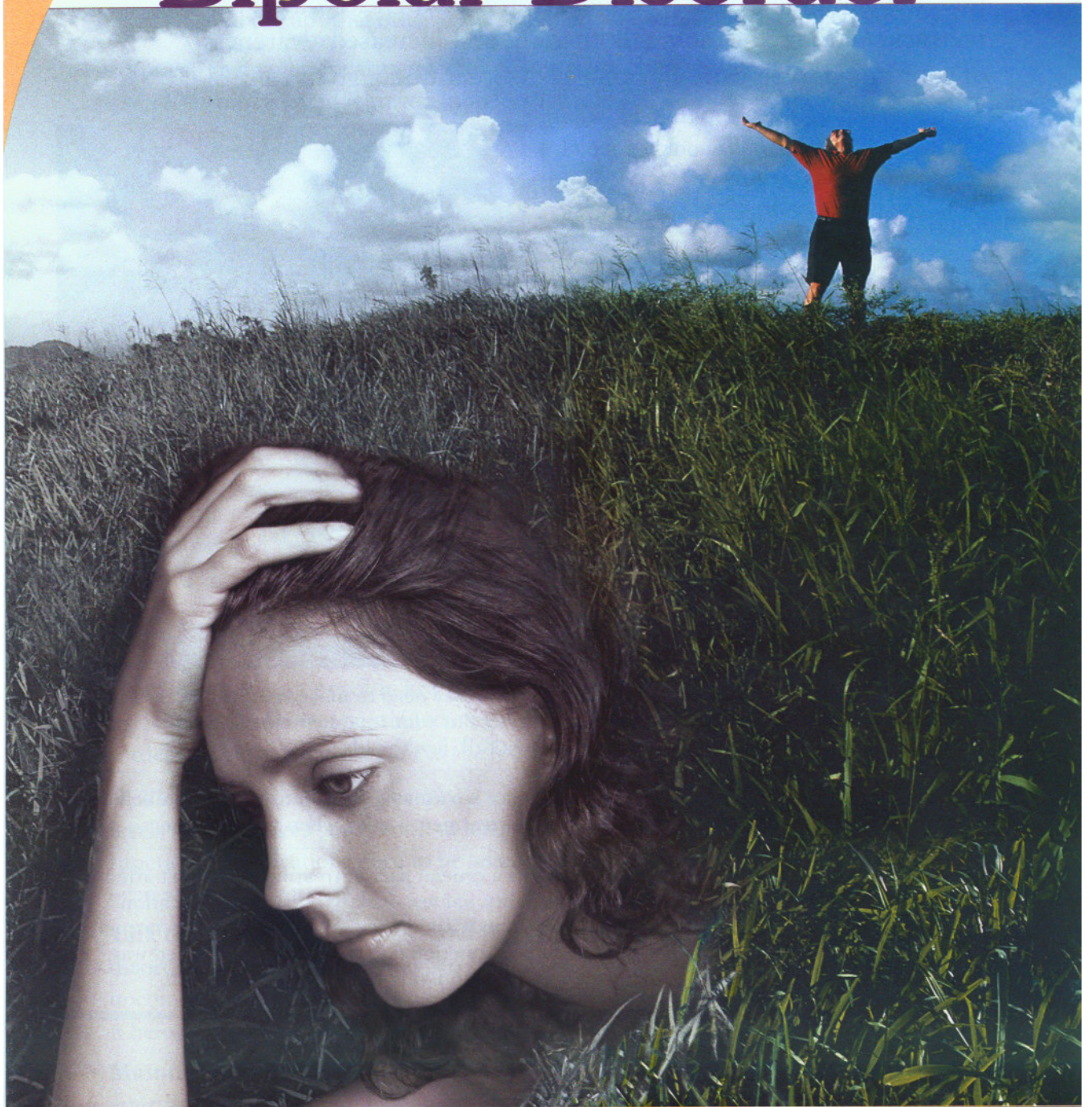


Bipolar Disorder



Take Control of Mania and Depression for a Better Life

A Cycle of Extreme Highs and Lows

Bipolar disorder (also called manic depression) is a health problem that affects your mood. It creates a cycle of extreme **depression** (“lows”) and **mania** (“highs”). These mood shifts impact how you think, feel, act, and function. If not controlled, bipolar disorder can lead to major problems in your life. Treatment can help you get back on track. With medication, talk therapy, and increased awareness of your moods, you can keep bipolar disorder under good control.

“

Sometimes I feel on top of the world. I might buy new clothes or a new car and not care about the cost. Then I realize I've spent way more than I can afford, and I crash.

”



Myth

“Having bipolar disorder means I can't lead a normal life.”

“When I'm feeling good, my bipolar disorder is cured.”

“If I take medication for bipolar disorder, it will change who I am.”

Fact

It's true that you may need to make some changes to your lifestyle. But with treatment and self-care, you *can* lead a full, healthy life.

Bipolar disorder is a lifelong condition. You need to follow through with treatment—even when you feel fine.

Medication is a crucial part of treatment. It won't affect your personality, values, or skills. Instead, medication brings your moods and behavior patterns back to normal. This helps you function *better*, in a more balanced way, so you can focus on living life to the fullest.

This booklet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.

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Does This Sound Like You?

To have bipolar disorder, you must have experienced mania at least once. Ask yourself the questions below. Check off the situations that sound familiar. If several happened at the same time, you may have been having a manic episode. Have you ever:

- ☐ Felt so good or “up” that other people thought you were acting strangely?
- ☐ Noticed that you were arguing with people more often, or that people were getting irritated with you more easily?
- ☐ Felt much more self-confident than usual? Did it get you into trouble or cause you to do things that were dangerous?
- ☐ Been so easily distracted that you couldn’t focus, even on simple tasks?
- ☐ Been much more social, active, or energetic than normal?
- ☐ Had very little sleep for several days in a row, yet weren’t tired?
- ☐ Talked so much or so fast that people couldn’t follow what you were saying?
- ☐ Been much more interested in sex than usual? Did you act on the impulses in ways you normally wouldn’t?
- ☐ Made impulsive, life-changing decisions without thinking them through? Did other people think your behavior was foolish or risky?

Bipolar Disorder Can Be Managed

Bipolar disorder is an ongoing health problem, like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease. It requires continued care. You can take control of bipolar disorder by committing yourself to the following.

- **Medication** restores brain chemicals to normal levels and stabilizes your mood to keep you functional. Medications need to be taken daily, even when you feel well.
- **Talk therapy** helps you understand bipolar disorder. You’ll also learn ways to spot an oncoming mood shift early, and how to handle it before it spirals out of control.
- **Maintaining a healthy lifestyle** helps keep your routine stable, mood balanced, and body healthy. This allows you to feel your best.

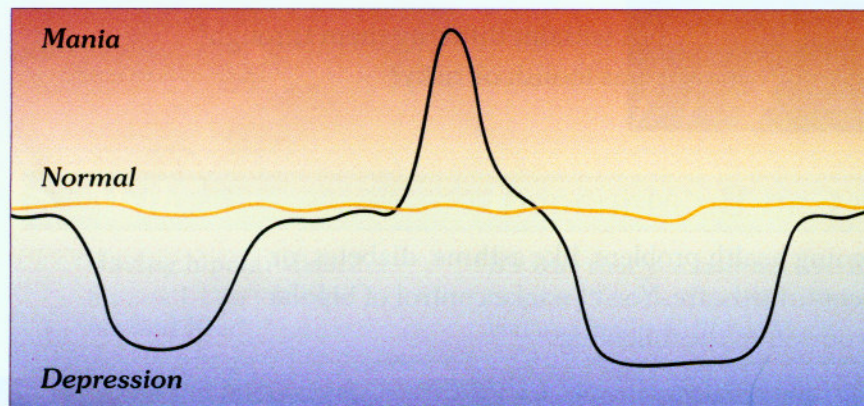


Understanding Mood Changes

Your mood can change due to many factors. When chemicals stimulate certain parts of the brain, mood may be affected. Other factors inside the body (such as overall health and how well-rested you are) can also affect mood. Factors outside the body (such as stressful events in your life) play a role, too. Normally, a person's mood shifts up or down slightly but stays within a fairly stable range. With bipolar disorder, mood shifts can be much more drastic.

The Bipolar Cycle

When you have bipolar disorder, your mood cycles between depression (severe lows) and mania (extreme highs). You could also have aspects of depression and mania at the same time (**mixed episode**). Shifts into mania or depression differ from normal mood shifts in that the highs and lows are so extreme, it's hard to function. Unlike normal mood shifts, bipolar moods often don't level out by themselves, or they may take a long time to return to normal. If you're depressed or manic, medication can bring your mood back within the normal range.



Normally, a person's mood shifts slightly but stays in a stable range (yellow line). When you have bipolar disorder, mood shifts can be much more extreme (black line). Medication brings your mood back to the normal range.

How Often Do Mood Shifts Occur?

Some people cycle between depression and mania 4 times a year or more. This is called **rapid cycling**. But for most people with bipolar disorder, mood shifts are less frequent. Each person's cycle is different. You may have been through this cycle a few times already, or only once. Also, the cycle isn't always consistent. Depression tends to happen more often than mania, and may last much longer. That's why many people with bipolar disorder are diagnosed with depression first.

What You May Experience

When your mood is in the normal range it may shift slightly up or down, but it stays stable. If you become depressed or manic, you or people around you will notice a change. With mania, you may feel great but do things you normally wouldn't. Depression makes you feel a lot worse than usual.



With mania, you may:

- Feel “on top of the world” and overly confident.
- Be irritated and more likely to argue.
- Need very little sleep, and still not feel tired.
- Have trouble focusing on any one thing for long.
- Have lots of extra energy or be unable to slow down.
- Have thoughts racing through your head.
- Talk a lot more than usual, and much faster.
- Do things without thinking about what could happen afterward, such as spend a lot of money, use drugs, or have sex with strangers.

With depression, you may:

- Have problems remembering, concentrating, or making decisions.
- Feel nervous and jumpy, restless, or irritable.
- Be unable to sleep, or sleep much more than usual.
- Not feel like eating, or eat too much.
- Lose interest in activities you normally enjoy.
- Feel weak, tired, and low in energy.
- Feel worthless or hopeless, or think life is not worth living.



Other Terms You May Hear

- **Hypomania** is a milder version of mania. You behave in similar ways, but don't get as out of control as you do during mania.
- **Psychosis** (“losing touch with reality”) can occur during severe mania or depression. Signs include hearing things that aren't real, or believing you have godlike powers. Psychosis can often be reversed with medication.

Clues That You Have Bipolar Disorder

The exact cause of bipolar disorder is unknown. Some people are born with it, but symptoms can stay hidden for years. Even so, your personal and family histories can provide clues that you have it.



Depression

Depression that keeps coming back (recurrent depression) could be a clue that you have bipolar disorder. Other clues include:

- Having depression so severe you need to be hospitalized.
- Having psychotic symptoms (see page 5).
- Having several antidepressant medications stop working for you, or not work at all.



Family History

Bipolar disorder often runs in families. Does one or more of your close relatives (such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling) have bipolar disorder or ongoing depression? If so, this could be a clue that you have bipolar disorder.

If You Have Been Diagnosed with Depression

Bipolar disorder includes both depression and mania. In many cases, though, depression is more obvious than mania. It lasts longer. And it makes you feel bad, so you're more likely to notice it. For these reasons, you may have been diagnosed only with depression, when you really have had bipolar disorder all along. The mania just wasn't detected when you were first diagnosed. Sometimes it can take years before the correct diagnosis is made.

Triggers for Bipolar Disorder

Certain factors can **trigger** (lead to) mania or depression. Some of the most common triggers are described below. These don't cause bipolar disorder directly, but they can bring it out.



Stress

Stress can have a big impact on your mood. Even when stress is due to something good, such as being promoted at work, it can trigger a major mood shift.



Disrupted Routine

Changes in routine can trigger mania or depression. This is especially true if your normal sleep-wake cycle (when you go to bed and when you wake up) changes. For instance, if traveling to another time zone prevents you from sleeping when you normally would, this disruption could trigger a manic episode.



Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol can upset the chemical balance in the brain. You may use drugs or alcohol to feel good. Or you may be trying to avoid or numb the pain in your life. But using them, even just once in a while, can trigger a shift in mood.



Medications

Sometimes medications (including antidepressants) can trigger mania. And depression can be a side effect of some medications. If you stop taking your medications for bipolar disorder, this could trigger a manic episode, too.

Assessing the Problem

Since bipolar disorder relates to your mood, your healthcare provider diagnoses it by asking a series of questions about your life. Your answers are used to find cycles of depression and mania. A physical exam and lab tests may also be done to rule out other health problems.

Diagnosing Bipolar Disorder

Your healthcare provider needs to evaluate what has happened to you and how you've acted at certain times in your life. He or she does this by asking about your mood and behavior. You may be asked about earlier times in your life, as well as the present. For instance:

- Have there been any recent changes in your mood or behavior? Is this visit prompted by a change in mood?
- Were there any big changes in your life (such as switching jobs, ending a relationship, or moving to a new house) just before your recent changes in mood?
- Have you ever felt or acted in the ways described on pages 3 and 5 of this booklet?
- Have you had problems with drugs or alcohol, or considered suicide?



Do You Think About Suicide?

Depression can make you feel so helpless and hopeless that you can't go on. And cycling moods can make you feel unable to cope with your life. Suicide may seem like a good escape. But death is not the answer. There are better ways to ease this pain and manage the problems in your life.

Please tell your doctor or someone you care about **right away** if you think about killing yourself. You can also call, toll-free, 800-SUICIDE (800-784-2433) from anywhere in the U.S.

Medications to Treat Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is treated with the medications listed below. Often, more than one type is prescribed. The medications work together to keep your mood balanced. To get the right results, you need to take *all* your medications as directed. Tell your doctor about other health problems you have and any medications you already take. This helps the doctor know what to prescribe for bipolar disorder.

<i>Medication</i>	<i>What It Does</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>Mood Stabilizer</i> Your medication:	Helps bring a manic or depressed mood back to normal. Prevents your mood from shifting back into mania or depression.	In some cases, regular lab tests are needed while on this medication. These tests ensure that the medication isn't having negative effects on the rest of your body. Don't stop taking this medication abruptly. Your doctor will help you stop gradually.
<i>Antidepressant</i> Your medication:	During depression, restores brain chemicals to healthy levels. Relieves symptoms to help you feel like yourself again.	If an antidepressant is prescribed, a mood stabilizer will likely be prescribed also. Taking an antidepressant by itself could trigger mania. Don't stop taking this medication abruptly. Your doctor will help you stop gradually.
<i>Antipsychotic</i> Your medication:	Quickly stabilizes a manic or mixed episode. Helps prevent a manic episode from starting. Relieves anxiety and restlessness. Helps you sleep.	This medication may be used to treat psychotic symptoms. But it also helps many people with bipolar disorder who are not having psychotic symptoms. An antipsychotic is sometimes taken with a mood stabilizer to boost the mood stabilizer's effects.
<i>Antianxiety</i> Your medication:	Reduces anxiety and agitation (warning signs of mania). Helps you sleep.	This medication could be addictive. If you have a history of addiction, it may not be prescribed. Talk to your doctor to learn more.

NOTE: Medications cause side effects. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist which side effects you can expect from your medications. You can also refer to the package insert to learn more.

Medications Must Be Taken As Directed

Medications improve your well-being and your ability to cope with life's problems. When your medications are working, you shouldn't feel anything special—just normal. If you don't, talk to your doctor. Your medications or dosages may need to be changed. To get the right effects, you must take your medications as prescribed. These pages will help you.

Finding the Right Medications

Medications don't work the same way for each person. To find the medications and dosages best for you, different amounts and types may be tried at first. During this time, let your doctor know how well your medication is working. This feedback helps your doctor figure out the best treatment. It may take a few weeks for your medications to start working. Don't be discouraged if you don't feel better right away.

Keep Taking Your Medications

You need to take your medications even when you feel good. When taken correctly, medications keep your mood stable. If you don't take them, your mood may shift into mania or depression. Many people are tempted to go off medication at times, just to see what would happen. This is not an option for most people. If your doctor has said stopping is an option for you, it should *only* be tried under his or her guidance.

“

I wonder what would happen if I went off my medication. But I don't want to get sick again, so I don't risk it.

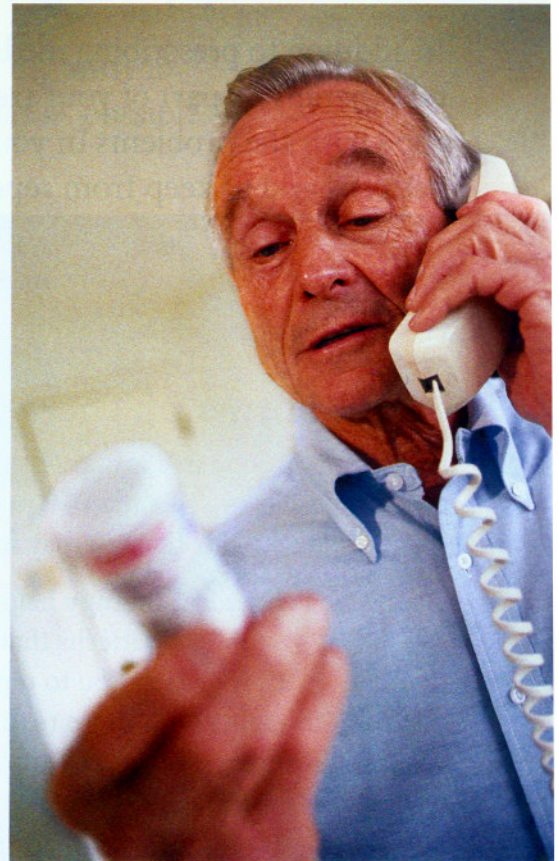
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Tips for Taking Medications

Medication needs to be taken on schedule to keep the right amount in your body. Missing even a few pills could cause a problem. Here are some tips to help you stay on track:

- **Refill prescriptions before you run out of pills.** If your prescription runs out, you could have side effects or even slip into mania or depression before you get your refill. Keep in mind that some pharmacies (such as mail order) take longer than others to do refills.
- **Set up a schedule.** Some medications can be taken when you brush your teeth in the morning, or every night at bedtime. Others may need to be taken at a specific time. Talk to your doctor about the schedule you should follow.
- **Find ways to remind yourself.** Use a pill box to organize pills for the week. Set your watch or computer alarm to go off when you're supposed to take your medication. Or, put a note on the bathroom mirror.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** If side effects are bothering you, a different medication or dosage might relieve them. Every problem has a solution. You just have to work together to find it.



When to Call Your Doctor

You have to make your doctor aware of a problem before he or she can help. Contact your doctor if:

- You have side effects or your moods are different than usual. Also call if you think your medication has stopped working.
- Your health changes, or you start new medications for other health problems. Your prescriptions for bipolar disorder may need to be adjusted.
- You become pregnant, or are thinking of getting pregnant. Your medications may need to be changed.
- You want to try an herb, supplement, or other natural remedy. These could interfere with prescribed medications or even trigger a shift in mood. Your doctor will advise you on what to do.

Talk Therapy Helps You Take Control

In addition to prescribing medication, your doctor may recommend talk therapy as part of your treatment. Therapy helps you learn to cope with the problems in your life. It helps you to see behavior patterns and to keep from repeating past mistakes. It also teaches you skills to live a healthier, more functional life, with fewer episodes of mania and depression.

Several Forms of Therapy Can Help

Therapy can be done in a group setting or one-on-one. It's led by a trained professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, counselor, social worker, or nurse. Your therapy may include one or more of these approaches.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy** helps you recognize thought patterns that lead to mood shifts. It teaches you to replace distorted thoughts with more realistic ones. You'll also learn to change how you react to certain thoughts.
- **Family-focused therapy** helps families learn to cope with bipolar disorder and support each other.
- **Interpersonal or social rhythm therapy** teaches you to keep a stable routine (see page 13) and maintain personal relationships. You'll also learn about other lifestyle changes that help keep bipolar disorder under control.
- **Psychoeducation** teaches you about what bipolar disorder means and what's involved in treatment.

“

Therapy is teaching me how to keep my life and my moods under control.

”



Keep a Stable Routine

Even a small change in routine can trigger a big shift in your mood. Try to keep your routine as regular as possible. This helps keep your mood healthy.

What You Can Do

The following will help you maintain a routine and stay healthy:

- **Sleep enough.** Having a stable sleep-wake cycle is an important key to staying healthy. Try to go to bed and get up at around the same time each day. Avoiding caffeine late in the day may help you sleep better.
- **Eat well.** Have meals at around the same time each day. Try not to skip meals. Healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and oil-rich fish are good choices at meals.
- **Be active.** Regular exercise boosts certain brain chemicals and helps reduce depression.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** These can disrupt your routine, make you forget to take your medication, and even trigger mood changes.
- **Keep a journal.** This can help you track mood changes and find patterns in your behavior. And sometimes it just helps to get your thoughts and feelings down on paper.



Tips for Family and Friends

- Be supportive, but try not to be controlling. Ask directly how you can help. Don't try to guess or assume you know best.
- Go together to a doctor's appointment or therapy session. Discuss your role in treatment.
- If you live together, follow the same routine (when possible).
- Check out the resources listed on the back of this booklet to learn more about bipolar disorder and how you can help.

Managing Bipolar Disorder Starts with You

Bipolar disorder is an ongoing problem, like heart disease, asthma, or diabetes. Keeping it under control takes attention and care. Get to know when your mood is stable and when it's moving in an unhealthy direction. These pages will get you started with the self-awareness and commitment needed to stay on top of bipolar disorder.

Accepting the Diagnosis

Bipolar disorder can be treated, but not cured. To keep your moods stable, you'll have to make some lifestyle changes. There are new things you'll need to do, and some activities you may need to avoid. Managing bipolar disorder can be overwhelming at first. It's perfectly normal to feel upset, angry, or frustrated. Feeling this way *does not* necessarily mean your mood is shifting into mania or depression. Remind yourself that as you start to know your patterns better, coping with bipolar disorder will become easier.



Who Should I Tell?

Therapy can help you decide who to tell about bipolar disorder, and how. Keep the following in mind:

- It's useful to tell people you live with, such as family or roommates. They can help you maintain a routine. And they can watch for early signs of a mood shift and help you stop it from getting worse.
- Telling trusted friends you have bipolar disorder may help you cope. And it may be easier for you to stay away from unhealthy activities, such as drinking or staying out all night, if your friends know the reason.
- Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you can't be fired because you have bipolar disorder. But you still need to fulfill your work responsibilities. You may want to tell your boss if an aspect of your work schedule, such as frequent travel or working a night shift, makes it hard to stay healthy.

Take Responsibility

No matter how well you follow your treatment plan, sudden mood shifts could still happen. It's up to you to learn what triggers mood shifts for you, so you can avoid these triggers. You also need to learn the early warning signs of a mood shift. If you catch it before it gets bad, you can take action to make things better. This takes some practice, but you *can* do it.

Early Warning Action Plan

Mania and depression can cloud your judgment. That's why you should write down your early warning signs of a mood shift, and what you'll do if they happen. Name a support person to carry out this action plan with you. He or she can help if you're unable to take care of yourself. The examples below are for mania, but you can use the same format to identify signs of depression, too.

Support person's name and phone number _____

Doctor's name and phone number _____

My early warning signs:

Examples *Spending a lot of money, having trouble sleeping* _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

What I will do if I notice these signs: What my support person will do:

Contact my doctor and my support person. _____ *Make sure I call the doctor and take my medication.* _____

Take Control of Your Health

Many people with bipolar disorder lead full, healthy lives. With self-care and the right treatment, you can be one of them. Just remember, you play the most important part in your treatment. Learn how to keep your moods stable, and when to get help from others. By doing so, you can stay on top of this disorder. For more information, contact your local hospital, mental health clinic, employee assistance program, or one of the resources below.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

800-826-3632 | www.dbsalliance.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness

800-950-6264 | www.nami.org

National Institute of Mental Health

866-615-6464 | www.nimh.nih.gov

American Psychiatric Association

888-357-7924 | www.healthyminds.org

American Psychological Association

800-374-2721 | www.apa.org/pubinfo

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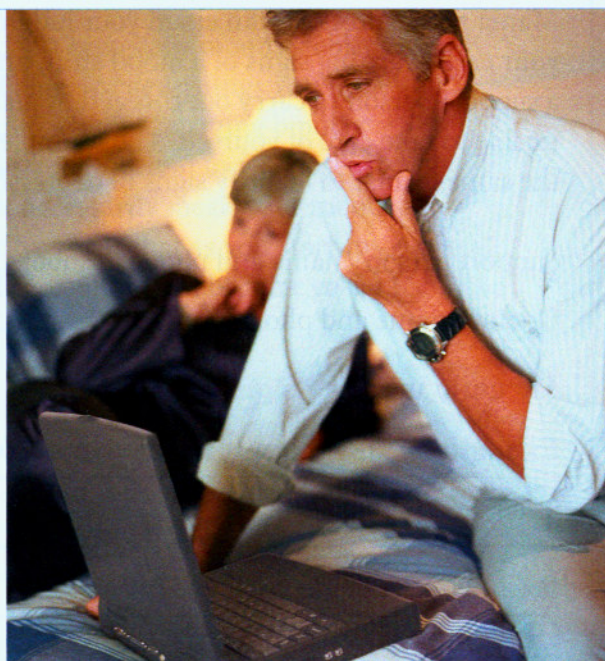
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