



An Introduction to Bipolar and your national Bipolar Charity



Bipolar UK is the national charity dedicated to supporting individuals with the much misunderstood and devastating condition of bipolar, their families and carers.

We provide a range of support services for individuals affected by bipolar including Information, Support & Advice, a national network of Support Groups (over 120 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland), a moderated 24/7 web-based peer support forum, a Mentoring Service, Youth (18 to 25 years of age) service and Workplace Training.

We also produce a selection of information and guidance publications, work in partnership with research organisations to improve medical treatment and seek to combat the stigma and discrimination of this severe mental health illness.

We believe the key to coping with bipolar is an early diagnosis, acceptance of the illness and adapting your lifestyle. Management of the illness can be achieved through strategies involving medication, health care, therapy and self management.

We work to ensure all individuals with bipolar can manage their illness and lead independent lives. We endorse the principles of equality and diversity in all our activities. With the amazing support of our staff team, volunteers, service users, supporters and partnering organisations we all work to support individuals and families affected by bipolar.

Support Bipolar UK

Bipolar UK Supporters understand just how crucial our work is to individuals and families affected by bipolar.

Although a small national charity, in the past year alone we supported more than 70,000 individuals and demand for our services is at an unprecedented high.

Your support will enable us to continue to provide vital services and meet rising demand.

To become a Bipolar UK Supporter:

- complete the enclosed leaflet
- visit our website www.bipolaruk.org.uk
- call 020 7931 6480

What is Bipolar?

Bipolar – sometimes known as manic depression – is a severe mental illness characterised by significant mood swings including manic highs and depressive lows. The majority of bipolar individuals experience alternating episodes of mania and depression.

Both males and females of any age and from any social or ethnic background can develop the illness. The symptoms can first occur and then reoccur when work, studies, family or emotional pressures are at their greatest. In women it can also be triggered by childbirth or during the menopause.

The key to coping with bipolar is an early diagnosis, acceptance of the illness and adapting your lifestyle so you are in control of the symptoms as much as possible. Management of the illness can be achieved through strategies involving medication, health care, therapy and self management.

Bipolar – The Facts

- 1% to 2% of the population experience a lifetime prevalence of bipolar disorder. Recent research suggests as many as 5% of the population are on the bipolar spectrum.
- Bipolar also has a huge impact on family and friends.
- On average it takes 10.5 years to receive a correct diagnosis for bipolar in the UK and before bipolar is diagnosed there is a misdiagnosis an average of 3.5 times.
- Compared to other health problems, treatment of bipolar is still badly affected by misunderstanding and stigma.
- Bipolar affects every aspect of your life and your relationships. Family and friends can all be put under stress. This is why you need to get a correct diagnosis, accept treatment and start to learn how you can adapt your lifestyle to cope with the ups and downs.

If I experience mood swings does that mean I have bipolar?

No, everyone has good and not so good days. We all have mood swings. However to put this in perspective, the Bipolar UK mood scale is from 0 to 10. Those of us who do not have bipolar will experience mood swings between 4 and 6 on the mood scale.

If you have bipolar, your mood swings go above stable levels anywhere between a 6 and 10. With bipolar when you experience depression it falls below 4 to as low as suicidal depression of 0.

Hypomania (6 to 8 on the mood scale).

Someone experiencing hypomania can seem very self confident and euphoric but may react with sudden anger, impatience or irritability for the slightest reason. They may become easily distracted, more talkative or challenging.

They may become more reckless than usual, which might mean errors of judgement, sometimes involving spending too much money or taking on more than they can cope with.

Mania (8 to 10 on the mood scale)

Someone experiencing mania may not recognise it is happening. Incoherent, rapid or disjointed thinking or being easily distracted are some symptoms.

Other symptoms may include verbal aggression, paranoia and hallucinations affecting vision or perception.

Grandiose delusions or ideas can occur where the sense of identity and self have been distorted by the illness. Sometimes the term psychosis (losing touch with reality) is used to describe these symptoms.

Depression (4 to 0 on the mood scale)

Most people with bipolar will experience severe depression at some time. Usually this will follow a period of mania or hypomania. For some people depression is more likely to occur during the winter months.

Common symptoms experienced during depression include: feelings of emptiness or worthlessness (as opposed to sadness), loss of energy and motivation for everyday activities, pessimism and negativity. Thoughts of death and suicide are also common symptoms.

Is there a cause and is there a cure?

Although much progress has been made in understanding bipolar disorder and how it can be managed, research has still not led to either a consensus on the cause or a cure.

Some research suggests that there is, if not a known genetic link, then certainly an inherited predisposition to developing bipolar disorder. It is also known that stressful life events may often precede an episode of mania, hypomania or depression. As our understanding of the function of the brain increases, more insights and more effective medication can be developed. This is why Bipolar UK works in partnership with research organisations.

What Helps?

We believe the majority of people with bipolar can effectively manage their illness through a combination of different approaches including medication.

There are a number of mood stabilising medications commonly prescribed for bipolar. Many people find these medications, taken singly or in combination, help stabilise their mood cycles. For more information please visit our website.

‘Talking therapies’ such as cognitive behavioural therapy and counselling can often be useful and used to help recovery. GPs and consultants can make referrals to local practitioners.

Learning about self management is an invaluable way of learning to manage mood swings and help lessen the severity of episodes. The principles of self management are carried through in our Support Groups and many of our services.

Self help is a tried and tested method, which has enabled many people to find the help and support they need. Many individuals find Bipolar Support Groups invaluable. For those who perhaps are not keen on group settings, perhaps do not live near a local group or wish to benefit from peer support more regularly, we host an online discussion forum – the eCommunity– on our website.

Our leaflets, information sheets and publications list feature a range of support and self help books.

Information, Support & Advice

We give practical information, support and advice throughout our website and in our free downloadable leaflets.

For practical bipolar advice you can contact us on 020 7931 6480, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

The telephone lines can get very busy, so you may prefer to email us on info@bipolaruk.org.uk

“As a recently diagnosed patient, Bipolar UK has been a life line for me.”

Bipolar UK publishes literature on different aspects of bipolar ranging from general information through to specialist information about coping strategies, medication, information for carers or others interested in knowing more about mood disorders.

“My family found the information and support very helpful and my sister recommended it to my parents. It helped them understand my diagnosis and feel they could talk to me about it. I very much appreciated your support in the weeks immediately after my diagnosis when I was coming to terms with it.”

Our website includes podcasts and personal experiences core to our appreciation and understanding of bipolar.

For further information please see our website or contact us on 020 7931 6480.

Bipolar UK Support Groups

Bipolar UK Support Groups cover the length and breadth of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Groups are free to attend and are open to all individuals affected by bipolar including those with a diagnosis, those pre-diagnosis, their family members, friends and carers.

“I attended my first bipolar support group last night and wish I had done so years ago. Really friendly and lovely people.”

Bipolar Support Groups offer:

- Regular (usually monthly) meetings
- A friendly, confidential and accepting environment
- Peer support through group discussion
- Useful information and practical advice
- Guidance on managing mood swings

“I was really shocked and frightened when the doctor told us my husband had bipolar. We both go to our local group and now I know other individuals and families and a lot more about the illness. We’ll manage now.”

To find out about the Bipolar UK Groups nearest to you, please look at our website www.bipolaruk.org.uk or do not hesitate to contact us on:

01270 230 260 England and Northern Ireland

01633 244 244 Wales

“When I came out of hospital, I didn’t know how I was going to face my family or friends. No one knew what to say. Meeting other people who have coped and being part of the group has been a real lifeline.”

There's no Bipolar UK Support Group in my area - What can I do?

We are always working to establish new Bipolar UK Support Groups.

If you are interested in helping to set up a Support Group in your area please call us on 01270 230 260 or email groupdevelopment@bipolaruk.org.uk

eCommunity

A vibrant, supportive web-based discussion forum for individuals affected by bipolar. The eCommunity is hosted and moderated by the charity providing a safe and secure environment for individuals to discuss the challenges they face.

“The forum has really helped me. I have received so much support from other users. It's been invaluable.”

Please look at our website, www.bipolaruk.org.uk, and complete the brief registration form.

Bipolar Link Mentoring

Peer support mentoring for individuals with a diagnosis of bipolar and carers. At the current time this service operates throughout Wales and in London/South East of England but we plan to expand nationally.

Mentoring is provided by volunteer mentors who have a diagnosis of bipolar or who have first-hand experience of living with someone with bipolar, providing support, advice and practical information.

"I'm not so afraid anymore. I owe my new life to Bipolar UK. Link Mentoring gave me me and they gave my children a mummy."

For further information about Bipolar Link Mentoring:

In England please call 020 7931 6480 or email mentoring@bipolaruk.org.uk

In Wales please call 01633 244 244 or email walesinfo@bipolaruk.org.uk

Bipolar Youth

Our Youth service supports young people aged between 18 and 25 years of age who are affected by bipolar.

This includes those who may or may not have a diagnosis, as well as young people who may be caring for someone with bipolar.

“Really helped me through a difficult time. The lady I spoke to had a great telephone manner, was easy to talk to and made me feel like I was so normal.”

For further information please call 020 7931 6480 or email youth@bipolaruk.org.uk.

Employment Support & Workplace Training

We provide bespoke work place training for employers and their employees. We plan (subject to funding) to further expand this service and develop dedicated employment support.

To find out more please call 01270 230 260 and ask for employment support or employmentsupport@bipolaruk.org.uk

New Services

As your national charity we strive to develop our services to meet the needs of individuals with bipolar, their families and carers. Please look at our website, in particular the news page, for the latest developments.

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