

# Understanding and Controlling Bipolar Disorder

Everyone has good and bad days.  
But when your moods fluctuate  
radically for no apparent reason,  
or when the ups and downs you  
experience are out of proportion  
to the events that inspired them,  
the cause may be bipolar disorder.  
Luckily, it is possible to regain  
one's balance.

## / Understanding Bipolar Disorder

Once known as *manic-depressive disorder*, bipolar disorder is a mood disorder. Sufferers experience **episodes of mania and phases of depression**.

These extreme mood swings have a variable duration, frequency and intensity. The moods of people suffering from bipolar disorder may be normal for months or years, but if the illness is not treated, there remains the risk of relapse.

## Recognizing the Signs

### MANIC EPISODE

- Feelings of euphoria, exaltation or intense pleasure
- Extremely high confidence or delusions of grandeur
- Increased energy
- Reduced hours of sleep
- Agitation, hyperactivity
- Racing thoughts and speech
- Difficulty focusing attention or concentration
- Impulsiveness, hasty decision-making
- Increase in activities (individual, social, or professional)
- Irritability or aggressiveness
- Paranoia, feeling of persecution
- Reckless behaviour (financial or sexual, for example)
- Hallucinations (hearing, seeing or smelling things that do not exist) and delusions (believing things that are not true)

### DEPRESSIVE EPISODE

- Feelings of sadness or emptiness
- Loss of interest in usual activities or difficulty experiencing pleasure
- Reduction in self-esteem, self-deprecation, feelings of guilt or failure
- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Physical ailments, such as headaches, back pain or upset stomach
- Difficulty focusing attention, concentrating or making decisions
- Isolation, withdrawal from social life
- Irritability
- Feelings of despair and suicidal thoughts (in this case, consult a professional immediately)
- Hallucinations (hearing, seeing or smelling things that do not exist) and delusions (believing things that are not true)

### ENDORSED BY:

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"Sometimes ideas were buzzing in my head and I had the impression that there was no limit to my abilities. At other times, I felt too demoralized to be able to do anything. My treatment now allows me to better channel my energy, and above all, I have more control over my life!"

Liliana, age 48

## / Who Can Suffer from Bipolar Disorder?

Men and women from all backgrounds and cultural communities may suffer from bipolar disorder. The illness generally begins to appear in adolescence or early adulthood.

The causes of bipolar disorder are not yet well understood, but genetic factors probably play a role in its occurrence. The risk of suffering from bipolar disorder is higher for those with a family member who has also suffered from it. Several factors **may trigger the symptoms of bipolar disorder**. These include: stress, lack of sleep, and drug or alcohol abuse.

It is often difficult to tell whether the changes in a person's behaviour are normal or whether they indicate a problem. This confusion is greatest during adolescence. If you have concerns about the possibility of a bipolar disorder, **consulting a health care professional remains the best way to get a clear picture of the situation**.

## / Everyday Consequences

Bipolar disorder not only affects a person's mood, but also his or her **emotions, judgment, behaviour and physical capacities**. These disturbances are felt in all areas of a person's life, as well as in the lives of his or her loved ones, causing a lot of anxiety and distress.

While experiencing an **episode of mania** or of hypomania, a person feels confident, dynamic and energetic—which may make the episode seem "positive." But his or her judgment is altered, and in this state a person may pursue excesses with unfortunate consequences. For example, a person may spend all the money he or she has saved, work without stopping to sleep or eat, or act in ways that endanger the health and safety of him- or herself and others.

The **depressive phase** of bipolar disorder results in such a decline in energy and motivation that it may become difficult for the person suffering it to work or study. Even washing and getting dressed may seem too difficult. The person may develop a negative self-image, feel guilt and fear being judged. As a result, he or she may withdraw and isolate him- or herself. This suffering may lead to deep despair and suicidal thoughts.

# / Overcoming Bipolar Disorder

## Getting Support

If you believe you have signs of depression or mania, **consult a health care professional (such as a doctor or psychologist) immediately.** Other health problems may cause symptoms similar to those of bipolar disorder, and more than one manic-depressive cycle must often pass before a professional can provide a precise diagnosis. For that reason, patience is important.

**Community resources** (such as those on the last page of this brochure) also provide information and support.

## Adapted Treatment

With appropriate treatment, **it is possible for people with bipolar disorder to recover, control the illness, prevent relapses and lead a satisfying life.**

The treatment of bipolar disorder consists of a combination of medication, psychotherapy and lifestyle-balancing strategies. These three aspects are important and complement one another.

## Getting Involved in Your Treatment

Recovery from bipolar disorder happens when you become fully committed in all aspects of your treatment.

- Attend follow-up appointments with your doctor.
- Participate actively and faithfully in your psychotherapy.
- Respect the dosage and duration of your medication.
- Adopt and maintain a balanced lifestyle.
- Do not give up any aspect of your treatment without first discussing it with a health care professional; if you have questions or concerns, talk about them with your health care professional.
- Keep track of the things that influence your mood.
- Work together with loved ones and all of the people who can help you maintain your balance.

## Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy helps people better cope with bipolar disorder and contributes to a better quality of life. It allows sufferers to better know themselves and identify the emotions, thoughts and behaviours that are harmful to their well-being. Support groups are also useful in helping people with bipolar disorder and their families overcome the difficulties they are experiencing.

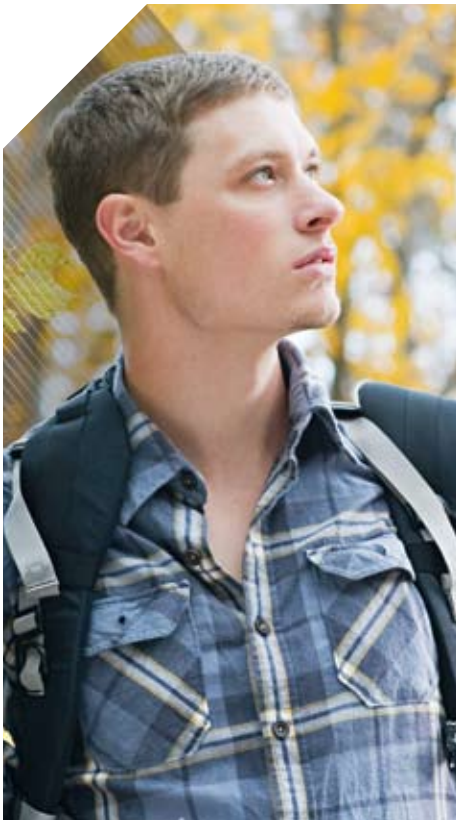
## Medication

Medication controls symptoms of the disorder and improves daily functioning. **Mood stabilizers**, such as lithium and anticonvulsants (anti-epileptics), are the type of medication most often used in the treatment of this disorder. Depending on the symptoms, other types of medication may also be prescribed, including antidepressants, anxiolytics or antipsychotics (neuroleptics).

## Strategies for Regaining Your Balance

Lifestyle habits and attitudes contribute to physical and mental balance. If you are suffering from bipolar disorder, the following strategies could reduce your risk of triggering an episode of mania or depression:

- Eat healthy foods, be active almost every day and make sure you sleep well.
- Manage your stress: organize your time by setting priorities and make time to relax, have fun and enjoy life's little pleasures.
- Be careful with substances that act on the nervous system: alcohol and caffeine should be consumed in moderation, medication should be taken only as prescribed, and illicit drugs and tobacco should be avoided completely.
- Surround yourself with people with whom you enjoy spending time, and whom you can count on when things are not going well.
- Reinforce your self-esteem by learning to appreciate your qualities and accept your limits.



## Helping a Loved One

If someone around you seems to show signs of bipolar disorder, find the courage to talk to this person about your concerns, without judgment, and encourage the person to consult a health care professional.

You can play an important role in your loved one's recovery by encouraging him or her to follow all of the aspects of treatment and not to give up medication or psychotherapy without talking about it with a health care professional.

Living with someone suffering from bipolar disorder can be challenging. Do not hesitate to ask for help and pay attention to your own limits.

## Preventing Suicide

The majority of people who take their own lives suffer from a mental disorder, such as depression or bipolar disorder.

**If you are thinking about suicide or if you are worried that someone close to you is considering suicide, get help immediately.**

- **Association québécoise de prévention du suicide, 1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)**
- **9-1-1 if it is an emergency**

## Resources Available to You

### HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

- Your **doctor** or **pharmacist**
- The **CLSC** or **CSSS** in your area  
[www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoires/csss](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoires/csss)
- **Ordre des psychologues du Québec**  
[www.ordrepsy.qc.ca](http://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca) / 1 800 561-1223
- **Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec**  
[www.optsq.org](http://www.optsq.org) / 1 888 731-9420
- Professional services at **school or work**
- **Info-Santé**  
Dial **8-1-1**  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Douglas Institute**  
[www.douglas.qc.ca](http://www.douglas.qc.ca)

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- **Mental Illness Foundation**  
[www.mentalillnessfoundation.org](http://www.mentalillnessfoundation.org)  
1 888 529-5354
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**  
[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- **Revivre**  
Quebec Anxiety, Depressive and Bipolar Disorder Support Association  
[www.revivre.org](http://www.revivre.org) / 1 866 REVIVRE (738-4873)
- **Fédération des familles et amis de la personne atteinte de maladie mentale**  
(Federation of families and friends of people with mental illnesses)  
[www.ffapamm.com](http://www.ffapamm.com) / 1 800 323-0474

### • Help Online

[www.aideenligne.ca/en](http://www.aideenligne.ca/en) / 1 866 766-5620

### • Association québécoise de prévention du suicide

24 hours a day, 7 days a week everywhere in Québec

[www.aqps.info](http://www.aqps.info)

**1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)**

- In case of an **emergency**, dial **9-1-1**.

### PASS THIS BROCHURE ON!

The information in this brochure should not be interpreted as providing a medical diagnosis, and should not take the place of consultation with a health care professional.

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