Stigma can occur when people unfairly judge others. People living with bipolar disorder can feel stigma related to their condition. However, there may be ways to address stigma to help improve your health and wellbeing.
Consumers with mental illness, such as those who have bipolar disorder, can experience stigma which may negatively impact their care. While working to manage the symptoms of their disease, consumers who experience stigma are also faced with combating stereotypes and misconceptions associated with their illness.

**Did You Know?**

- Bipolar I disorder will affect approximately 4.9 million adult Americans over the course of their lifetime
- Bipolar I disorder affects men and women equally
- Bipolar I disorder can be diagnosed at any age. However, the onset of bipolar typically begins between the ages of 15-24
- Bipolar disorder can affect anyone. It appears to have a genetic link, and a family history of bipolar disorder is a strong risk factor; however, it does affect all races and social classes

Consumers with bipolar disorder may feel stigmatized for their disorder. Although there are not many studies that focus specifically on stigma and consumers with bipolar disorder, there is substantial research related to stigma and mental illnesses. This resource is based upon this knowledge and the belief that consumers with bipolar disorder may be subject to the same types of stigma as those consumers with other mental illnesses.
Treatment and Stigma

Stigma is frequently cited as a barrier to mental healthcare and is associated with a reduction in seeking treatment. The healthcare environment itself is an environment in which consumers with mental illness may experience stigma and discrimination.

For consumers with mental illness, stigma can lead to:

- Increased likelihood of self-silence
- Inadequate access to proper treatment
- Less treatment compliance
- Greater avoidance of healthcare services

Treatment helps many consumers—even those with the most severe forms of bipolar disorder—gain better control of their mood swings and other bipolar symptoms.

It is important to talk with your doctor about stigma because it can impact many areas of your life and sometimes lead to consumers stopping treatment for their condition. However, positive wellness and health outcomes may be possible if consumers continue treatment and medication as prescribed by their doctor.
Some strategies to consider to support your treatment include:

- **Peer support:** Ask your doctor or your health insurer if a care management or peer support program is available. Talking to other consumers who have bipolar disorder may help you better understand your symptoms. Additionally, groups such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance may have local and online support groups for your area.

- **Automatic prescription refills:** Many pharmacies and health insurers offer automatic refills of medications. Some prescriptions can even be delivered by mail right to your door. This makes it easier to receive your medications without others knowing, if that is a concern you have.

- **Psychiatric Advanced Directive:** You can continue to make your wishes about your care known if you are ill by having a Psychiatric Advanced Directive (PAD). A PAD outlines your desires when you are unable to do so yourself.

**Talking to Others**

Telling family, friends, and coworkers about your illness might be a positive experience. It can help them understand what bipolar disorder is and how it affects you. This can help reduce stigma about your illness. It can also improve your self-confidence. If you hide your illness from people you care about, you may feel worse. Talking about your illness can make it easier to get the support you need.
Types of Stigma

Public stigma occurs when people endorse the stereotypes of mental illness and act upon them in an unfair and discriminatory manner. For some consumers living with bipolar disorder, stigma brought on by others can affect their sense of self.

Consumers may experience self-stigma. Self-stigma is when people unfairly judge themselves. This can lead to low self-esteem, feelings of shame or embarrassment, or lower their belief that they are capable of doing something.

They may also experience structural stigma, which refers to institutional practices that limit a consumer’s opportunities and resources.

Feelings of stigma can be brought on by many triggers, including:

Stigma brought on by others
- Being rejected by others due to the illness
- Experiencing discrimination
- Negative portrayals of people with mental illness in the media

Self-stigma
- Feeling like you do not fit in

Label avoidance
- Not seeking care because of a concern that you will be labeled

Structural stigma
- A limit on your ability to hold public office or serve on a jury
- Limits on parental custody
- Limits on ability to vote

Consumers with mental illness may experience label avoidance, which means they may not seek care because they are concerned they will be labeled.
Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or a member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.
A Resource for Consumers

Understanding Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that affects people’s moods. People with bipolar disorder have moods and feelings that are more extreme than normal ups and downs.
Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that affects people’s moods. Bipolar I disorder, marked by extreme manic episodes, has a lifetime prevalence of 2.1% and a 12-month prevalence of 1.5%. This equates to approximately 4.9 million and 3.7 million adult Americans, respectively, who are affected.

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a common and serious condition. Bipolar disorder is a chronic mental illness and refers to several diagnoses, including bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymic disorder. It causes people to have large shifts in their moods. Moods can range from extreme happiness and high energy to extreme sadness and low energy. These moods may be severe enough to affect your ability to carry out day-to-day tasks.

Bipolar I disorder is defined by manic episodes lasting at least 7 days, or by manic symptoms requiring immediate hospitalization. A diagnosis of Bipolar II disorder is identified by a pattern of depressive episodes and hypomanic episodes, but not the full-blown manic episodes seen with bipolar I. With cyclothymic disorder, individuals experience numerous periods of hypomanic symptoms and depressive symptoms lasting for at least 2 years.

While bipolar II seems to be more common in women, bipolar I disorder affects men and women equally. The onset of bipolar disorder typically begins between the ages of 15-24. Medicine and therapy may help people with bipolar disorder manage their symptoms and the disease.
Signs and Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder have moods and feelings that are more extreme than normal ups and downs. These moods and feelings can affect your ability to sleep, stay focused, think clearly, or have relationships. You may have “manic episodes” and feel hyper or have lots of energy. You may also have “depressive episodes” when you feel extremely sad. These episodes may last most of the day, every day, for a week, or longer. Depressive episodes are thought to happen more often than manic episodes.

Signs of a manic episode*:

- Feeling very “up,” “high,” or “wired”
- Increased energy levels (beyond normal)
- Having trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Being more active than usual
- Talking very fast and about many topics
- Being agitated or irritable
- Racing thoughts
- Believing one is more able to do several things at once (multitask)
- Doing risky things, like spending a lot of money or engaging in promiscuous sex

Signs of a depressive episode*:

- Feeling very “down,” sad, or hopeless
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling unable to enjoy anything
- Feeling worried or empty
- Having trouble concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Eating too much or too little
- Thoughts about death or suicide

*If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms, seek professional help by talking to your doctor.
Diagnosing Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder may be difficult to diagnose. Sometimes, people with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed as having depression or other condition. However, people with bipolar disorder also have manic episodes.

You should tell your treatment team about past manic episodes. This will help your treatment team make a correct diagnosis. You should also tell them if other family members have bipolar disorder. Although bipolar disorder tends to run in families, not everyone with a family history will develop the illness.

If you believe that you or a loved one may have bipolar disorder, ask your doctor or other healthcare practitioner for a screening.

Sometimes, people with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed as having depression or other condition.
Your Treatment Team

Getting help is important! A treatment team can be made up of several healthcare professionals who can give you information about bipolar disorder. They may also be able to help you manage your illness.

Here’s an introduction to who might be on a treatment team:

**Psychiatrists**
The psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in mental health and prescribes medication

**Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants**
Many psychiatrists will rely on these healthcare professionals to help manage day-to-day treatment

**Psychologists, Psychiatric Social Workers, and Counselors**
These are professionals who help consumers with therapy, such as cognitive behavior therapy or family therapy

**Nurses**
Nurses work closely with you and your caregivers, case workers and social workers to discuss treatment and your needs

**Social Workers**
Social workers also offer counseling. They may help you find various social services to help with problems in your daily life

**Case Managers**
A case manager can help find services and programs to help with daily living. They can also help you apply for benefits
Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or a member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.
Living with bipolar disorder can be a challenge. With the help of your treatment team, family, friends, and by sticking to a treatment plan, you may be able to better manage your symptoms and feel better.
Did You Know?

- Bipolar I disorder will affect approximately 4.9 million adult Americans over the course of their lifetime
- Bipolar I disorder affects men and women equally, although symptoms may vary between the genders
- Bipolar I disorder can be diagnosed at any age. The onset of bipolar typically begins between the ages of 15-24. However, the average age of onset for bipolar I disorder is 22 years
- Bipolar disorder can affect anyone. It appears to have a genetic link, and a family history of bipolar disorder is a strong risk factor; however, it does not just affect one race or social class

Bipolar disorder is a condition which generally requires lifelong treatment.

Treatment may help many consumers—even those with the most severe forms of bipolar disorder—gain better control of their mood swings and other bipolar symptoms.

There are different treatments that may help people with bipolar disorder. These include therapy, peer support, care management, and various types of medication.
Types of helpful therapy include:

- **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy**
  May help consumers with their thoughts and beliefs about bipolar disorder, as well as with how they solve problems and communicate.

- **Family-Focused Therapy**
  May help consumers and family members communicate better.

- **Interpersonal and Social Rhythm Therapies**
  May help consumers to have regular patterns of behavior and stable relationships.

- **Group Psychotherapy**
  May help consumers with issues such as staying with a treatment plan and dealing with the long-term nature of bipolar disorder.

**Psychoeducation**, special education aimed at teaching consumers about bipolar disorder and helping them achieve their treatment goals, can be used with these therapies.

**You and your treatment team should work together to decide which specific therapies may be best for you. Talk with your treatment team about what to expect with any form of treatment.**
Medication for Bipolar Disorder

Different types of medication are used to help people with bipolar disorder. Medication is almost always needed for treatment of bipolar disorder, but it may be combined with other therapies, including the therapies listed on the previous page.

Medications used to treat bipolar may include:

- Mood stabilizers
- Antidepressants
- Antipsychotics

The treatment of bipolar disorder is comprised of two main phases—acute and maintenance—each with different goals. Consumers enter the maintenance phase after successful completion of the acute phase.

### Treatment Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acute Phase</th>
<th>Maintenance Phase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stabilization:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Getting to remission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Complete return to baseline level of functioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Almost a complete lack of symptoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Try to protect against another episode</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maximize functioning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Minimize ongoing symptoms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Minimize negative side effects of treatment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the general goals of treatment are to:

- Manage acute episodes
- Prevent recurrences
- Improve functioning between episodes
- Provide support
Help for Leading a Fulfilling Life With Bipolar Disorder

In addition to medication and talk therapy, there are other supports that may help.

**Peer Support**
Talking to others with bipolar disorder may help you understand the condition. Peers can also provide support for you during treatment.

**Support Groups**
These groups provide information about bipolar disorder and its treatment. Support groups include the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and the National Alliance for Mental Illness, among others.

**Friends and Family**
Don’t forget the people that care about you. They can help you as well.

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Bipolar disorder is usually a lifelong illness, so long-term help is needed to stay well. This includes following treatment and developing a plan, even if you have been feeling well for a long time.

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There Is Hope

Remember that setbacks can happen to anyone. Take it one step at a time, one day at a time. You are not alone. Your family, friends, and treatment team can help.
Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or a member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.
Living with bipolar disorder can be a challenge. By sticking with therapy, working with your treatment team, and paying attention to your mood and health, you may be able to better manage your symptoms and feel better.
Bipolar Disorder Is a Chronic Mental Illness

Bipolar disorder includes several diagnoses, including bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymic disorder. Bipolar disorder is a brain condition that causes extreme changes in a person’s mood and energy level. It is usually a lifelong condition. Sometimes you might feel very down or depressed. At other times, you might have so much energy that your thoughts race and your need for sleep is very low. This is called “mania.” Both depression and mania may negatively affect your relationships and your ability to work or go to school.

Living with bipolar disorder may be hard for you and the people around you. The right kinds of treatment may help you manage your symptoms. Treatment usually includes medication and talk therapy.

Tips for living with bipolar disorder:

- Ask your treatment team for information about your condition so you can educate yourself
- Participate in your therapy plan and stick with it
- Take the medications prescribed by your treatment team
- Talk to your treatment team about any side effects you experience
- Get enough sleep
- Develop daily routines
- Avoid stress when possible and plan ahead for stressful times
- Be aware of symptoms as they happen and seek help as early as possible if you need it

It isn’t uncommon to feel unsure about whether you want to continue treatment. If you stop taking medication suddenly, it may result in your symptoms getting worse. Staying on a treatment plan over time may help.
What to Do if You Think You Have Bipolar Disorder

For general information on mental health and to find local treatment services, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or visit SAMHSA’s Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator where you can search for treatment information by address, city, or zip code.

Additional information and resources can be found on the National Institute of Mental Health’s web page, Help for Mental Illnesses.

If you are in crisis, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential.

If you are thinking about harming yourself or thinking about suicide:

- Tell someone who can help right away
- Call your licensed mental health professional if you are already working with one
- Call your doctor
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department

There Is Hope

Bipolar disorder is usually a lifelong illness. Remember that long-term help may be needed to stay well. This includes sticking with treatment and developing a plan for when symptoms return, even if you have been feeling well for a long time.

Remember that setbacks can happen to anyone. Take it one step at a time, one day at a time. You are not alone. Your family, friends, and treatment team can help!
Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

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