

The recovery journey is unique for each individual. There are several definitions of recovery, some grounded in medical and clinical values, some grounded in context of community and successful living. One of the most important principles of recovery is this: recovery is a process, not an event. The uniqueness and individual nature of recovery must be honored. While serious mental illness impacts individuals in many challenging ways, the concept that all individuals can move towards wellness is paramount.

Bipolar disorder presents a special challenge because its manic, or hypomania, stages can be seductive. People with bipolar disorder may be afraid to seek treatment because they are afraid that they will feel flat, less capable or less creative. These fears must be weighed against the benefits of getting and staying well. A person may feel good while manic but may make choices that could seriously damage relationships, finances, health, home life or job prospects.

It is very common for people living with bipolar disorder to want to discontinue their medication because of side effects or because it has been a long time since the last episode of illness. However, it should be remembered that the progress one has attained is reliant upon continuing to take medication. **RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE!**

How to Get Help

No insurance? Call the NAMI Southern Arizona office to help guide you to access mental health services.

If you have bipolar disorder:

- ◆ Seek medical care through a psychiatrist and/or your primary care physician.
- ◆ Find the right combination of treatment that works for you which may include medication, therapy, support groups, etc.
- ◆ **Sometimes people must try several different treatments or combinations of treatment before they find the one that works for them.*
- ◆ Take NAMI's Peer-to-Peer course and/or join the NAMI Connection support group.
- ◆ LEARN about your illness. The more you know, the more you are able to help yourself. Start with NAMI today!

If you are a family member with a loved one who has mental illness:

- ◆ Take care of yourself.
- ◆ Take NAMI's Family-to-Family course, join a Family & Friends Support Group and/or take NAMI Basics if you have a loved one who is a child or adolescent.
- ◆ Family, friends and partners of military service members and veterans can take NAMI's Homefront course.
- ◆ Learn about your loved one's illness.

SHOW YOU CARE. WEAR A SILVER RIBBON.



- Help break down the barriers to treatment and support.
- Help reduce stigma —talk about it!



**FIND HELP.
FIND HOPE.**

Mental illness affects 1 in 5 people. We provide resources and support to all those affected by mental illness.

**NAMI SOUTHERN ARIZONA DEPENDS ON YOU.
THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO HELP.
BECOME A MEMBER, VOLUNTEER OR DONATE.**

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BIPOLAR DISORDER

Educational information and local support provided by:



What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a chronic illness with recurring episodes of mania and depression that can last from one day to months. This mental illness causes unusual and dramatic shifts in mood, energy and the ability to think clearly. Cycles of high (manic) and low (depressive) moods may follow an irregular pattern that differs from the typical ups and downs experienced by most people. The symptoms of bipolar disorder can have a negative impact on a person's life. Damaged relationships or a decline in job or school performance are potential effects, but positive outcomes are possible.

Two main features characterize people who live with bipolar disorder: intensity and oscillation (ups and downs). People living with bipolar disorder often experience two intense emotional states. These two states are known as mania and depression. A manic state can be identified by feelings of extreme irritability and/or euphoria, along with several other symptoms during the same week such as agitation, surges of energy, reduced need for sleep, talkativeness, pleasure-seeking and increased risk-taking behavior. On the other side, when people experience symptoms of depression, they feel extremely sad, hopeless and lethargic. Not everyone's symptoms are the same, and the severity of mania and depression can vary.

More than 10 million Americans have bipolar disorder. Because of its irregular patterns, bipolar disorder is often hard to diagnose. Although the illness can occur at any point in life, more than one-half of all cases begin

between ages 15 to 25. Bipolar disorder affects men and women equally.

How is bipolar disorder diagnosed?

As with all types of illness, a physician must be seen to provide a proper diagnosis. Unfortunately, there is no simple blood test or brain scan that identifies bipolar disorder. The doctor will rule out other causes such as hyperthyroidism. If other medical conditions are not diagnosed, a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist needs to be consulted.

A psychiatrist diagnoses bipolar disorder by using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and observing a spectrum of symptoms.

Symptoms of mania are as follows:

- ◆ Extreme happiness for an extended period of time.
- ◆ An abnormally increased level of irritability.
- ◆ Overconfidence or an extremely inflated self-esteem.
- ◆ Increased talkativeness.
- ◆ Decreased amount of sleep.
- ◆ Risky behavior, such as spending sprees and impulsive sex.
- ◆ Racing thoughts, jumping quickly from one idea to another.
- ◆ Distractibility.
- ◆ Agitation or "jumpiness."

Symptoms of depression are as follows:

- ◆ Diminished capacity for pleasure or loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.

- ◆ A long period of feeling hopeless or helpless with low self-esteem.
- ◆ Decreased amount of energy and constant fatigue.
- ◆ Inability to concentrate and make simple decisions.
- ◆ Changes in eating, sleeping or other daily habits.
- ◆ Agitation or slow movement, speech or thought.
- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide attempts.

The states of mania and depression can occur in distinct episodes or can switch rapidly, even multiple times in one week. A person who is experiencing a severe bipolar episode of mania or depression may also have psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions.

What are the treatments for bipolar disorder?

Recognition and diagnosis of the disorder in its earliest stages is important so effective treatment can begin. Effective treatment plans usually include medication, psychotherapy, education, self-management strategies and external supports such as family, friends and formal support groups.

Medication is effective in the stabilization and treatment of bipolar disorder. However, not everyone responds to medications in the same way, and often multiple types of medication must be assessed in order to find the one, or ones, that are the most effective for an individual. Medications used to treat bipolar disorder often include mood-stabilizing medications, second-generation

antipsychotics and standard antidepressant medications. For the most up-to-date information on use and side effects, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at www.fda.gov.

Psychotherapy and other interventions are essential components in the treatment of bipolar disorder. Most useful psychotherapies generally focus on understanding the illness, learning how to cope and changing ineffective patterns of thinking. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one popular example.

Family-focused therapy involves family members or friends in supportive roles. They participate by learning about the illness and in developing and carrying out a treatment plan of the person's choosing. This is known as family-focused therapy.

What does recovery look like?

As people become familiar with their illness, they recognize their own unique patterns of behavior. If individuals recognize these signs and seek effective and timely care, they can often prevent relapses. But because bipolar disorder has no cure, treatment must be continuous.

Individuals who live with bipolar disorder also benefit tremendously from taking responsibility for their own recovery. Once the illness is adequately managed, one must monitor potential side effects.

The notion of recovery involves a variety of perspectives. Recovery from serious mental illness is a holistic process that includes attaining, and maintaining, physical health as another cornerstone of wellness.