

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

# Bipolar Disorder & Suicide Risk

Bipolar disorder is a complex mental health condition characterized by significant mood shifts, ranging from intense highs (mania or “manic” episodes) to deep lows (depression or “depressive” episodes). These changes can impact energy levels, thinking patterns, behavior, and sleep. During these mood episodes, individuals may struggle with daily responsibilities, work or school commitments, and maintaining relationships.<sup>1</sup>

## Causes of Bipolar Disorder

While there’s no single known cause of bipolar disorder, several factors may contribute. Genetics play a role—having a parent or sibling with the condition increases risk—but it’s not guaranteed. Even identical twins don’t always both develop it. Stressful life events, like loss, illness, or financial issues, can trigger episodes, and a person’s stress response may influence onset. Brain scans can’t diagnose bipolar disorder, but researchers have found subtle differences in brain structure and activity in those affected.<sup>2</sup>

## Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition characterized by extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). Symptoms of mania can include increased energy, racing thoughts, impulsive behavior, decreased need for sleep, and grandiosity. In contrast, depressive episodes may cause feelings of sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and thoughts of suicide. These mood shifts can significantly impact a person's daily life, relationships, and work.

Recognizing the symptoms early and seeking appropriate treatment, including therapy and medication, can help manage the disorder and reduce the risk of suicide. It’s important for individuals experiencing these symptoms to reach out for support from mental health professionals, loved ones, or helplines.<sup>3</sup>

How you can help support those with bipolar disorder:

- **Educate Yourself:** Understand the symptoms, treatments, and challenges of bipolar disorder. This helps you approach the person with empathy and patience.
- **Encourage Treatment:** Support them in seeking professional help, whether it’s therapy, medication, or a combination of both.
- **Listen Without Judgment:** Offer a safe space for them to express their feelings. Active listening can help them feel understood.
- **Maintain Routines:** Help them maintain regular sleep patterns, healthy eating, and exercise routines.
- **Be Aware of Warning Signs:** Learn to recognize when they may be entering a manic or depressive episode and provide appropriate support.

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## Treatments for Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that can significantly impact a person's life, but with the right treatment, individuals can manage their symptoms. Treatment for bipolar disorder often includes a combination of medication and psychotherapy:

- **Medications** such as mood stabilizers, antidepressants, and antipsychotics can help regulate mood swings and prevent episodes of mania or depression.
- **Psychotherapy**, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), can support individuals in managing stress, improving relationships, and developing coping strategies.

Additionally, lifestyle changes, including regular exercise, healthy sleep patterns, and reducing substance use, play a key role in maintaining stability.

It's important for those with bipolar disorder to work closely with healthcare providers to find the most effective treatment plan that fits their needs. Early intervention and consistent treatment are necessary in reducing the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, making comprehensive care a key part of suicide prevention.<sup>4</sup>

## Bipolar Disorder and Suicide Risk

Bipolar disorder carries a significant risk of suicide, particularly during depressive episodes. According to the National Library of Medicine, "Researchers estimate that between 25% and 60% of individuals with bipolar disorder will attempt suicide at least once in their lives and between 4% and 19% will die by suicide."

Warning signs include extreme hopelessness, withdrawal from loved ones, increased substance use, or talking about death. If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, seek immediate help by contacting a crisis hotline or a mental health professional. Support and treatment can make a crucial difference in managing bipolar disorder and reducing suicide risk.<sup>5</sup>

### References

- 1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "Bipolar Disorder." <https://news.cuanschutz.edu/news-stories/expert-untangles-complexities-of-grief-for-suicide-loss-survivors>. Accessed April 1, 2025.
- 2 National Alliance on Mental Illness. "Bipolar Disorder." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/end-of-life/in-depth/suicide/art-20044900>. Accessed April 1, 2025.
- 3 Cleveland Clinic. "Bipolar Disorder." <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9294-bipolar-disorder>. Accessed April 2, 2025.
- 4 The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. "Bipolar Disorder." <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/mental-behavioral/mood-disorders/bipolar-disorder>. Accessed April 2, 2025.
- 5 National Library of Medicine. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4536929/>. Accessed April 2, 2025.

### ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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