

Treating bipolar I disorder



The aim of treatment in bipolar I disorder is to control and to reduce the severity of symptoms, and to prevent new episodes from happening, so that life can stay as normal as possible. Even if a person still has episodes, with treatment they are usually less serious and don't happen as often.

Being diagnosed and getting treatment as early as possible is an important step in dealing with bipolar I disorder. Researchers have also shown that continuing to take treatment regularly can help a person feel better for longer.

Diagnosis

Early diagnosis and treatment can help a person control their bipolar I disorder and feel better for longer.

When someone is diagnosed with bipolar I disorder, it is common for them to be prescribed one or more medications to take. Most medications should be taken daily.

Medication

Common types of medications given to people with bipolar I disorder:

Mood stabilisers:

carbamazepine, lamotrigine, lithium, sodium valproate,

Antipsychotics: aripiprazole, asenapine, olanzapine, quetiapine, risperidone, ziprasidone

Not all medications are available in every country and should be carefully discussed with a doctor

Different medications are often combined to treat the different phases of bipolar I disorder. A mood stabiliser can be combined with an antidepressant to treat bipolar depression. An antipsychotic may also be given to treat mania. This type of combined treatment is also often given to people who experience both manic and depressive symptoms. Medications are available that can treat manic symptoms and improve depressive symptoms simultaneously, meaning people can avoid the hassle of having to take lots of different medications. These medications have been designed to treat the manic symptoms rapidly and effectively, but have also been shown to improve depressive symptoms. This can help people with bipolar I disorder feel more stable and less in need of extra health and medical care.

Not all medications work for everybody. Some treatments are associated with more side effects than others. Treatment should be discussed regularly with a psychiatrist to ensure a person is receiving the best medication(s) for them. The ideal treatment should give a person the relief from symptoms they need, with as little medication and side effects as possible.

Medications need to be taken regularly to work properly. Sometimes it can take a while to start feeling the effects, so it's important that a person keeps taking their medication, even if they don't feel any different. It is also important to contact a psychiatrist if unpleasant side effects occur.

Even if a person is feeling well, it's important that they don't stop taking their medication. If treatment is stopped too early, it's common for a relapse of symptoms to occur.

Taking medication

It's common to be given more than one medication to treat bipolar I disorder. Medication will only work if it's taken regularly and properly

Other treatment

As well as taking medications, non-pharmacological treatments are an important part of helping people to stay well. Psychotherapy (sometimes called 'psychoeducation') can help people with bipolar I disorder to learn more about their condition, how to recognise the warning signs of an episode, and help them to live a life that's as normal as possible.