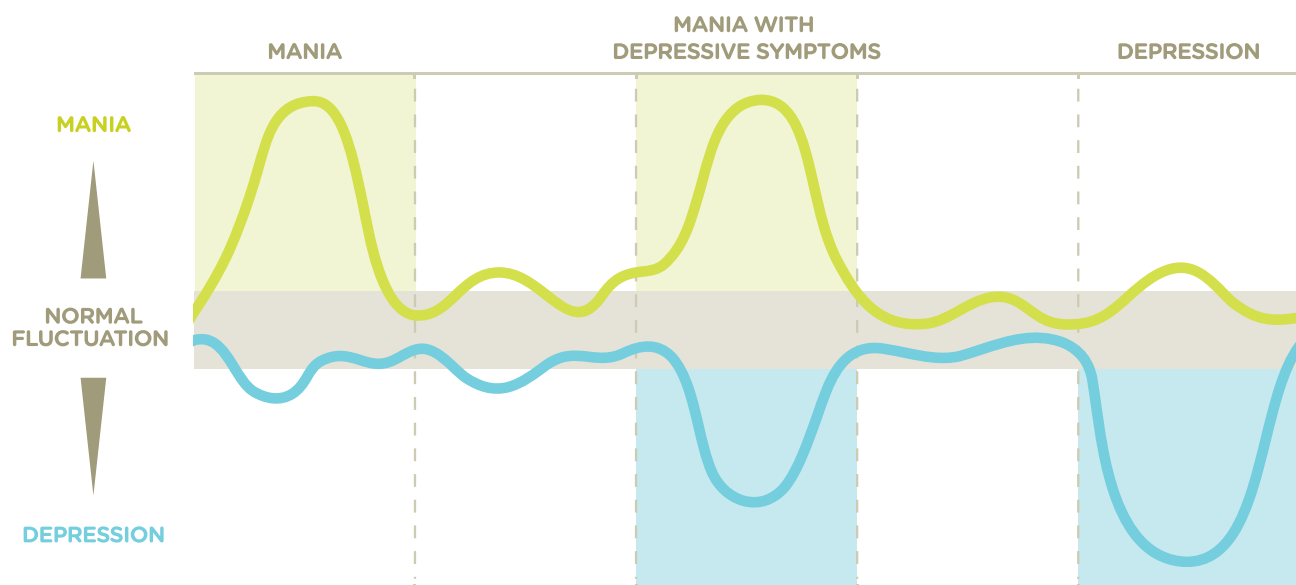


What is bipolar I disorder?



What is bipolar I disorder?



Bipolar I disorder is a disease that affects a person's mood, causing it to swing suddenly from one extreme to the other, from depression to an abnormally elevated mood (sometimes called a **manic** mood). Most people experience ups and downs from time to time, but with bipolar I disorder, mood changes are so pronounced that they interfere with everyday activities and relationships with others. Unlike regular mood swings, each period of extreme mood can last for several weeks or longer, with

some people rarely experiencing a 'normal' mood. Bipolar I disorder can also affect a person's biological rhythms, leading to problems with sleep, appetite and thinking.

What are the main symptoms of bipolar I disorder?

Bipolar I disorder is usually divided into **episodes** of mania or depression. Symptoms therefore vary depending on the type of mood episode a person is

experiencing. These "mood episodes" don't necessarily relate to events in a person's life - someone who has recently become a parent could become depressed just as a person who has lost a close relative could react with mania.

Mania

During a **manic episode**, a person usually feels very happy; overjoyed and full of energy. They may not feel like sleeping, may talk quickly and become annoyed easily. People experiencing mania may also have overly ambitious plans and indulge in risky behaviours with bad consequences, like spending lots of money, engaging in unusual sexual activities, drinking excessively or taking drugs. During a manic episode, they may even feel very creative and view mania as a positive experience.

However, they may also have strange feelings, like seeing, hearing or smelling things that are not there (**hallucinations**), or believing things that seem unbelievable to other people (**delusions**). These feelings are more common in younger people, and are sometimes called **psychotic events**.

There may also be periods when a person has feelings of mania, but to a lesser degree. These periods are called **hypomanic episodes** and are important to recognize because pure manic episodes often follow if hypomanic episodes go untreated.

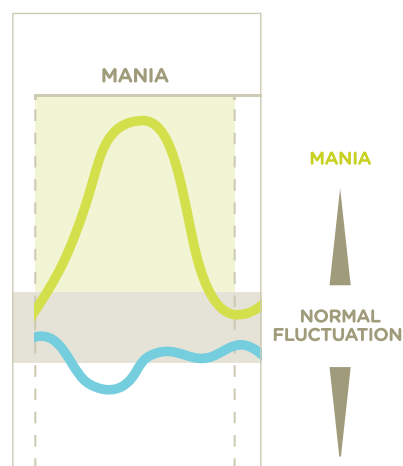
Symptoms of Mania (hypomania)

- Feeling very happy, euphoric or overjoyed
- Talking quickly
- Racing thoughts
- Feeling full of energy
- Not needing to sleep
- Feeling self-important
- Having important ideas or plans for the future
- Being easily distracted
- Being easily irritated or aggressive
- Indulging in risky behaviours that can have bad consequences, like spending lots of money, engaging in unusual sexual activities, drinking excessively or taking drugs
- Making risky decisions that could be harmful
- Not eating
- Having delusions and hallucinations (not in hypomania)
- Being unaware or in denial of having a disorder

Mania

A person having an episode of **mania** often feels **very happy or overjoyed, full of energy and awake**. They do **not usually feel like sleeping**. They sometimes **talk quickly**, with **racing thoughts**. They do **risky things that can have bad consequences**, like spending lots of money, engaging in unusual sexual activities, drinking excessively or taking drugs.

Mania in bipolar disorder



Depression

During a **depressive episode**, a person usually feels very sad or low, fatigued, and lacks energy. They often lose interest or pleasure in things they enjoyed doing before and sometimes find it hard to concentrate, remember things or make decisions. Problems with sleep are very common: insomnia or, conversely, sleeping a lot more than usual. A person who feels depressed may also experience feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or guilt, leading to thoughts of death or suicide. If suicidal feelings occur, it is important to contact a psychiatrist immediately.

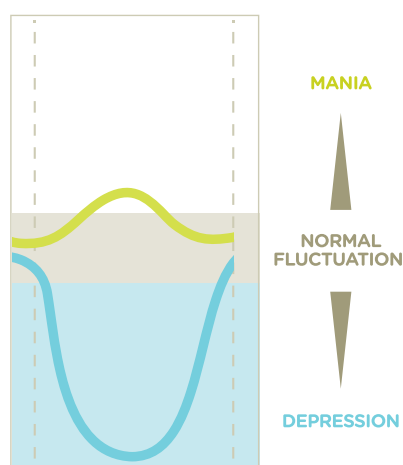
Symptoms of depression

- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Feeling negative about everything
- Feeling empty and worthless
- Feeling suicidal
- Feeling guilty
- Having no energy
- Feeling tired or very sleepy
- Finding it hard to concentrate and remember things
- Finding it hard to make decisions
- Loss of interest in social or recreational activities
- Not eating or not feeling hungry
- Waking up early

Depression

A person having an episode of **depression** often feels **very sad, negative about everything, tired, guilty and worthless**. They sometimes find it hard to **concentrate, remember things or make decisions**. **Suicidal thoughts** are common and are extremely important to discuss with a psychiatrist.

Depression in bipolar disorder



Mania with depressive symptoms

Sometimes during a manic episode, a person can experience depressive symptoms either simultaneously or fluctuating with manic symptoms, a state referred to as mixed symptoms, mixed features or mixed episodes. For example, a person can feel full of energy and euphoric but have a lack of interest in doing normal activities and feel empty inside, at the same time. Having suicidal thoughts and feeling guilty, anxious agitated or irritable are other common depressive symptoms experienced during mania. Similarly, a person can have manic symptoms during an episode of depression.

These types of episodes in bipolar I disorder are the hardest for people to spot and for psychiatrists to diagnose

Mania with depressive symptoms

Symptoms that occur either simultaneously or fluctuate with symptoms of mania:

- Sadness
- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Feelings of guilt
- Blaming close ones
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Being easily irritated
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling agitated

Depression with manic symptoms

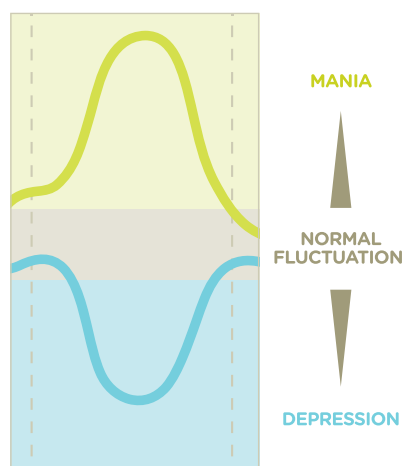
Symptoms that occur either simultaneously, or fluctuate with symptoms of depression:

- Feeling really happy
- Feeling full of energy
- Feeling self-important
- Racing thoughts
- Talking quickly
- Not needing to sleep (different from insomnia)
- Indulging in risky behaviours with bad consequences, like spending lots of money, engaging in unusual sexual activities, drinking excessively or taking drugs

Mania and Depression

Sometimes, a person having an episode of mania may also experience symptoms of depression, either simultaneously or fluctuating, with manic symptoms. Similarly, people can experience manic symptoms with an episode of depression.

Mania with depressive symptoms



How long can an episode last?

Episodes of mania or depression can last for days, weeks or sometimes longer. Before there were effective treatments, a person with episodes of mania could have them for four to six months or more.

A person experiencing an episode of mania with depressive symptoms may feel unwell for even longer still, especially with depression, which can often last a year or more. Today, because of treatment, bipolar I episodes are a lot shorter in most people than they used to be.

How does bipolar I disorder develop over time?

Between episodes, it is common to have periods of time when there are very few or no symptoms of mania or depression at all. During these periods people with bipolar I disorder can be highly functional.



How is bipolar I disorder diagnosed?

The first symptoms that many people experience are those of depression, and it can take years before the first manic episode occurs and the diagnosis of bipolar I disorder is made. Even when a person experiences manic symptoms early on, bipolar I disorder can still be hard to diagnose, because people don't realise their symptoms are being caused by a disease. This is especially true in those experiencing mania - during an episode, they may feel like other people are being negative and unhelpful, but after the episode they may be shocked by the way they have behaved. If a doctor thinks a person might have bipolar I disorder, they will usually send them to see a psychiatrist. Being diagnosed is a really important step towards living with a disease like bipolar I disorder. Learning to recognise the warning signs of an episode, and taking the right treatment to control the symptoms can help make life as normal as possible.

Who gets bipolar I disorder?

Bipolar I disorder is not uncommon, and affects around one or two people in every 100. Symptoms can start at any age, but often the first signs of the disease occur in adolescence, when the body is growing and changing. The fact that it happens at this time, when a person is usually starting to socialise and go out more, can make it harder to diagnose. Bipolar I disorder can change over a person's lifetime – it may go from mania to depression and back to mania again over the years. Each episode may be different; for example, sometimes, only manic symptoms may be present, but other times a person may feel both manic and depressive symptoms.

Both men and women have the same risk of developing bipolar I disorder.

What causes bipolar I disorder?

The causes of bipolar I disorder are not well understood. In some people, bipolar I disorder is passed on from their relatives – it is common to see many members of the same family suffering from the disease. A history of low self-esteem is also thought to be related to developing bipolar I disorder. Environmental factors like stress, use of alcohol and/or drugs and lack of sleep are also known to trigger episodes. Traumatic events are also a known trigger, e.g. death of a close relative.



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Imagery sourced from Colourbox and
does not depict real patients.

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