

Understanding Bipolar Disorder

A careful overview of mood episodes, early warning signs, routines, and the importance of professional treatment.

What bipolar disorder involves

Bipolar disorders involve episodes of depression and periods of elevated or unusually irritable mood with changes in energy, sleep, activity, thinking, and behavior. Diagnosis requires careful clinical assessment because several conditions can look similar.

Possible elevated-mood signs

- Markedly reduced need for sleep without feeling tired.
- Unusually increased energy, activity, confidence, or talkativeness.
- Racing thoughts or distractibility.
- Impulsive spending, sexual behavior, substance use, risk-taking, or major projects.
- Irritability or agitation that is a clear change from baseline.

Protective strategies

- Track sleep, mood, energy, and major behavior changes.
- Protect regular sleep and daily rhythms.
- Involve trusted supports in identifying early warning signs.
- Take prescribed medication consistently and discuss changes with the prescriber rather than stopping abruptly.
- Seek urgent professional help for severe agitation, psychosis, dangerous behavior, or suicidal thinking.

Try this reflection

What are the earliest changes in sleep, energy, or behavior that signal you are moving away from your usual baseline?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.