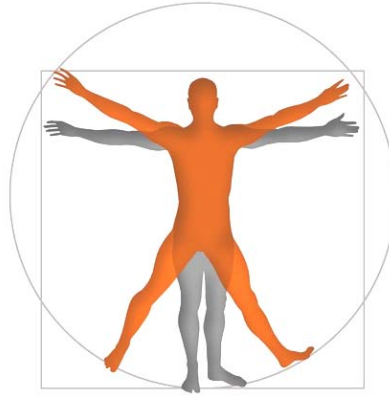


Psychological treatments for bipolar disorder

- Medication is the mainstay treatment, but psychological support is crucially important
- Get a counsellor
- Learn all you can about the illness
- Develop a stay-well plan
- Move from a position of feeling controlled by the illness, to taking control of it.




While medication is the mainstay treatment for people who have bipolar disorder, psychological support that helps you come to terms with the illness and learn how to manage it, is also crucially important. If your aim is to do all you can to prevent or minimise future episodes, then enlisting the help of counselling, learning all you can about the illness, and developing a “stay well plan” will significantly improve your chances of success. Furthermore, by committing to do all you can to help yourself, you tend to move from a position of feeling “controlled” by the illness, to feeling much more “in control of it”.

The slide features an orange header with the title 'Psychological issues' in white. The main content area is white with a grey border and contains a bulleted list. In the background, there are faint silhouettes of people in various poses, including one in the foreground that is solid orange.

Psychological issues

- A diagnosis of bipolar disorder is a shock to one's sense of self (or sometimes a relief)
- Acceptance of the diagnosis, and its implications, takes time and psychological effort to integrate (sparks identity issues)
- Onset of bipolar disorder often interrupts the establishment of an "adult" sense of self. Education, career, love prospects are all potentially jeopardised
- Counselling can help sort out these issues.

A diagnosis of bipolar disorder is usually a shock to a person's sense of identity – it takes time to accept the diagnosis and what it might mean for your life. Things like study plans, career, and finding a life partner can be seriously compromised, especially at first, and counselling can help you sort out issues like these.



Psychological therapy approaches

- There are many different psychological therapy options to choose from
- Most approaches are equally effective – the most important thing is to find a therapist that you feel comfortable with who is:
 - *Empathic*
 - *Professional*
 - *Respectful* towards you.

When you come to choose a counsellor or therapist, it can be daunting because there are many different types of therapies, for example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Narrative Therapy or Solution Focused therapy. Most approaches are about equally effective, though, as long as you find a therapist you feel comfortable with – preferably one who is empathic, professional, and respectful toward you.

The slide features an orange header with the title 'Supportive counselling' in white. Below the header is a white box with a grey border containing a bulleted list of ten points. The background of the slide shows faint silhouettes of people in a supportive setting.

Supportive counselling

- Explore attitude to diagnosis
- Provide information on resources and positive role models
- Work through shock/grief and perceived losses
- Help rebuild sense of self
- Encourage you to take good care of your physical health
- Encourage you to maintain supportive close relationships
- Incorporate peaceful “quality of life” relaxation activities
- Foster your personal growth
- Help you develop a “stay-well plan”.

Good supportive counselling for bipolar disorder should explore how you feel about the diagnosis and provide information about resources and positive role-model. It should help you work through any grief or losses the illness has entailed, help you rebuild your sense of self, encourage you to take good care of your physical health and to maintain supportive close relationships. Incorporating peaceful, “quality of life” relaxation activities is also recommended, like time with friends or pets, journal writing, yoga, meditation, or gardening. In short, therapy should foster your personal growth. In particular, you need to bring your creativity into your everyday life, rather than leaving it stranded in times of hypomania. As with anyone, it is much easier to deal effectively with challenges when you are inspired and growing. Finally, a major task of counselling is to help you develop a “stay-well plan”.



Stay well plan

- Identify your particular early warning signs and triggers/stresses ✓
- Nominate who you will count on for feedback ✓
- Formalise an agreement about who will do what if you fall ill ✓
- Include your psychiatrist's advice about what extra medications to take ✓
- Nominate preferences for how you prefer to be treated if you become ill (i.e. psychiatrist vs doctor vs crisis team vs hospital) ✓
- Outline how you plan to reduce triggers and stressors. ✓

A Stay Well plan should identify your early warning signs, and any triggers or stresses that appeared to precede or prompt your episodes. It should nominate who you will count on to tell you if they see early warning signs, (and formalise an agreement about who will do what, if so). It should also include your psychiatrist's advice about what extra medications you can take when you feel at risk, say, when you are not sleeping. It can also nominate your preferences for how you want to be treated and which health professionals you prefer to handle things if you become ill. Finally, it should set out how you plan to reduce illness triggers and unnecessary stresses in your life.



Mystical experiences

- Mystical experiences can be a powerful part of mania – yet the search to find meaning could trigger further episodes.
- It's important to distinguish, when well, which beliefs and behaviours are inflated by mania
- Whether psychotic or spiritual or both, these experiences can be worked through in therapy much like dream analysis – some parts are precious and meaningful, others distorted and “nonsensical”.

Many people have profound mystical experiences in a manic or hypomanic state.

This can sometimes spark a spiritual search that can, if followed too zealously, be fraught with danger for triggering further episodes.

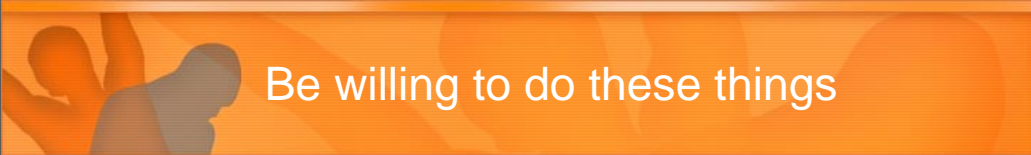
It is very important, therefore, when you are well, to distinguish which of your beliefs you would see as being inflated by mania. This is difficult, but important to recognise .



Early warning signs

- Not sleeping
- Agitation, irritability, emotional intensity
- Energised with ideas and plans
- Inability to concentrate
- Rapid thoughts and speech
- Spending more money than usual
- Increased sexual drive, flirtatiousness
- Increasing paranoid thoughts
- Neglecting to eat, losing track of time
- Difficulty remembering what day and month it is
- Reading extra symbolism into words, events, patterns, seeing “codes”
- Insistent and persuasive
- Making contact with many people
- Erratic thinking, speech, behaviour
- Increases in or binges in drug taking – eg. cannabis, ecstasy, drinking
- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Arguments with friends or family
- Believing that radio or TV are sending special messages
- Increased “driven” activity without stopping to eat, drink or sleep
- Increased interest in religious/spiritual ideas or themes
- Taking on more work, working to extremes in hours or projects
- Grandiose plans or claims

Everyone has a different combination of early warning signs and symptoms, but things like not sleeping and emotional intensity and taking things to excess are very characteristic. People tend to talk very fast, be very grandiose, often they spend a lot of money and sometimes they get paranoid ideas. The most important thing though, is for you to know what your early warning signs are. This is so that you can catch them at the earliest possible moment, even at the very first thought. It's vital to know your own early warning signs if you want to prevent or head off episodes. But you have to catch them at the earliest possible moment – even at the very first thought. Here is an example of what I mean from my own experience. One Sunday morning I woke up at 6am and immediately thought “I'll get up and start digging to make a new garden bed near the garage”. I felt full of energy and sparkle. But then I thought “hang on, I don't usually want to leap out of bed at 6am on a Sunday – this could be hypomania. I'll leave the garden bed for later and try to go back to sleep.” When I woke up a couple of hours later, I no longer had that sparkly, excited feeling. By simply refusing to follow that impulse immediately, I believe I saved myself from a potential episode, by stopping it very early from escalating.



Be willing to do these things

- Accept illness
- Take medication
- Make use of counselling
- Educate yourself, especially high risk activities
- Identify and be vigilant of your early warning signs
- Reduce stress
- Ensure regular eating, exercise, sleep and relaxation
- Enlist the help of trusted others.

Finally, if you want to maximise your chances of staying well for years, even decades, as some do, here is a list of do's and don'ts. You do need to have a willingness to accept that you have the illness, to take medication as a preventive safety net, to make use of counselling where appropriate, for support, and to learn about the nature of bipolar disorder, especially your own high risk activities and early warning signs. You need to manage stresses at work, rest and play and you need to keep your metabolism strong and balanced with regular meals, sleep, relaxation, and exercise. It really does work best if you allow trusted family or friends to help you detect early warning signs, but if family or friends are themselves of the problem, then find ways to reduce that stress.

Things to avoid

- Avoid illicit drugs
- Don't drink too much alcohol or coffee
- Don't suddenly stop taking prescribed drugs
– see your psychiatrist first
- Avoid intense emotional/spiritual workshops
- Don't act on impulses.



There are also certain things it is best to avoid. Avoid cannabis and other illicit drugs – they trigger episode. Be moderate in your alcohol and coffee intake and don't suddenly stop taking prescribed drugs – check with your psychiatrist first. Also, avoid intense emotional or spiritual workshops – they often mess with the metabolism, gentle approaches are best. And don't act immediately on possible manic impulses – allow a little time to reconsider.

Make the most of your life

- Find what you love, what gives your life meaning, and do it



- Don't aim too low with long-range expectations
 - Decide to learn your way back to a fulfilling lifestyle
 - Bring your creativity into your ordinary life not just in mania
- Make your ordinary life too precious to risk becoming ill.

Another thing, people become depressed partly because they aim too high with their goals in the short term, and then, feeling discouraged, aim too low with their goals in the long-term, which leaves them unfulfilled. Once you have things back in control, aim for the kind of lifestyle that will be manageable enough in terms of stress, but also interesting and fulfilling for you in the long run.