



and talking over people, making decisions in a flash, constantly on the go and feeling less need for sleep.

- **Positive mood** – feeling confident and capable, optimistic that one can succeed in everything, more creative, happier and feeling ‘high as a kite’.
- **Irritability** – irritable mood and impatient and angry behaviours.
- **Inappropriate behaviour** – becoming over involved in other peoples’ activities, engaging in increased risk taking (i.e. by over indulging in alcohol and drugs and gambling excessively) saying and doing outrageous things, spending more money, having increased libido; dressing more colourfully and with disinhibition.
- **Heightened creativity** – ‘seeing things in a new light’, seeing things vividly and with crystal clarity, senses are heightened and feeling quite capable of writing the ‘great Australian novel’.
- **Mystical experiences** – believing that there are special connections between events, that there is a higher rate of coincidence between things happening, feeling at one with nature and appreciating the beauty and the world around, and believing that things have special significance.

More extreme expressions of mania (but not hypomania) may have the added features of delusions and hallucinations.

A number of other symptoms can indicate whether there is a likely diagnosis of bipolar disorder, particularly for those under the age of 40. These include:

- Racing thoughts (for example, feeling like you are watching a number of different TV channels at the same time, but not being able to focus on any)
- Feeling agitated, restless and/or incredibly frustrated.

When to seek help for bipolar disorder

If you have experienced an episode of mania or hypomania, or have scored 22 or more on the [Bipolar Disorder Self-Test](#), it is advisable to seek professional assessment by a mental health practitioner.

The first step is to arrange a consultation with your GP. They will provide an assessment and, where necessary, refer you to a psychiatrist for further treatment. Bipolar disorder which is left untreated, will likely involve further episodes of mania or hypomania. Bipolar disorder is not an illness which goes away of its own accord, but one which often needs long-term treatment. Accurately diagnosing bipolar disorder is a task for the mental health professional.

Some people with bipolar disorder can become suicidal. It is very important that talk of suicide be taken seriously and for such people to be



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treated immediately. In an emergency you can go straight to your local hospital's emergency department for help.

Key points to remember

- Bipolar disorder is an illness involving exaggerated swings of mood and energy from one extreme to the other, usually involving alternating periods of depression and mania or hypomania.
- The pattern of mood swings for each individual is quite unique.
- The six features of mania and hypomania are:
 1. High energy levels
 2. Positive mood
 3. Irritability
 4. Inappropriate behaviour
 5. Heightened creativity
 6. Mystical experiences.
- For people under the age of 40, other symptoms of bipolar disorder may include feeling agitated, restless and/or incredibly frustrated.

- Accurately diagnosing bipolar disorder is a task for a skilled mental health practitioner.
- If symptoms of bipolar disorder are suspected it's best to first see a GP, who will likely refer you to a psychiatrist.
- People with bipolar disorder can become suicidal. Talk of suicide should be taken seriously and immediate help should be sought from a GP or other mental health professional.

Where to get more information

A **Daily Mood Graph** and other relevant fact sheets can be downloaded from our website at: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets/

Mastering Bipolar Disorder: an insider's guide to managing mood swings and finding balance, Kerrie Evers & Gordon Parker (2008) Allen & Unwin.

1800 011 511 Mental Health Line is a NSW Government phone service operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week and will provide a telephone triage assessment and referral service staffed by mental health clinicians.



For more information

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