



Bipolar disorder

UniCare Health Plan of West Virginia Inc. (UniCare) has a care management program for bipolar disorder. This program will help you better understand and manage your bipolar disorder. We can assist you to set health goals and create a care plan that fits your lifestyle. You do not have to join the program. You are enrolled as a member of UniCare.

Living with bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder or manic-depressive illness is a brain disorder. People who have bipolar disorder may have shifts in mood, energy and activity levels and be unable to carry out day-to-day tasks. A person with bipolar disorder may go from having long periods of feeling “high” or overly happy to long periods of feeling “down,” worried or hopeless and then start over again. The “high” feeling is called mania. The “down” feeling is called depression. These feelings may make it hard to concentrate and keep close contact with friends and family.

We want you to know you can take control.

If you like, we will keep your provider informed of your condition and the services we provide you. Your case manager can help you learn how to better manage your bipolar disorder.

Things to know:

- The cause of bipolar disorder is not known.
- One possible cause is an imbalance of chemicals in the brain.
- Symptoms of bipolar disorder may vary.
- In a manic episode, you may feel very happy and have a lot of energy, or you may feel like you do not need very much sleep. You may do things that are risky or dangerous. You may have other symptoms.
- After a manic episode, you may start to feel more like yourself, or you may start feeling depressed.
- In a depressive episode, you may have trouble thinking or making decisions. You may lose interest in things you have done in the past. You may even have thoughts about hurting yourself. You may have other symptoms.
- The mood swings of bipolar disorder can be mild or severe.
- The important thing to know about bipolar disorder is that it can be treated.
- We can share more information to help you with bipolar disorder.

How is bipolar disorder treated?

Right now there is no cure for bipolar disorder. Treatment can help control symptoms and improve your quality of life.

- The first step to treating bipolar disorder is to see a health care provider.
- People with bipolar disorder may have other health conditions. Be sure to talk with your provider about all your health conditions.



- Different types of medicine can help. People respond to medicines in different ways. Sometimes you may need to try different medicines to see which one works best for you.
- Psychotherapy or talk therapy can help. Therapy can help you change your behavior and manage your life. It can help you to get along better with your family and friends.
- Talk to your provider about other treatment for your bipolar disorder.

What you should know about bipolar disorder medications:

- If you are taking bipolar disorder medications, do not drive until you know how your medication is going to make you feel.
- Some medications may cause side effects, such as dry mouth, dizziness, headache, nausea and blurred vision. You may have other side effects.
- People have different responses to medications. Talk to your provider before taking new medications. These include medications that do not need a prescription.
- Talk to your provider about any concerns you have about your medications. Your provider can help find a medication that has the fewest side effects and will work for you.
- Bipolar disorder medication only works if taken daily as ordered by a provider. It can take time for your medications to take effect.
- It is very important to take the medication even if you are feeling better.
- Always follow your provider's advice about how much medication to take and how often to take it.
- Talk with your provider before stopping medications.
- We can help you know how to take your medications the right way.
- We can help you understand how your medications work.

How can family and friends help?

Family and friends play an important part in helping a person who has bipolar disorder. They will need to know as much as possible about the illness. They also can help you to take your medications the right way. To help someone with bipolar disorder, a friend or relative can:

- Be patient and understanding about mood swings
- Encourage the person to stay in treatment
- Talk with the person and listen to what he or she has to say
- Include the person in fun activities
- Remind the person that getting better is possible with the right treatment
- Never ignore comments about suicide and let the person's therapist or provider know right away
- Family members may benefit from attending counseling together



What can you do?

You can help yourself by getting treatment and sticking with it. It takes time, and it's not easy. But treatment is the best way to start feeling better. Here are a few things you can do to help with your treatment:

- Talk to your provider about your treatment.
- Do mild activity or exercise. Go to a movie, a ballgame or another event or activity that you once enjoyed. Take part in religious, social or other activities.
- Set goals for yourself that are reachable.
- Stay on your medication.
- Try to spend time with other people. Talk to a trusted friend or relative. Try not to be alone. Let others help you.
- Your symptoms will improve over time, not right away. Do not expect to feel better right away.
- Learn to recognize your mood swings.
- Keep a daily routine. Eat a healthy diet and sleep at regular times. Make sure you get enough sleep.

Support to help you manage your bipolar disorder

- We can help you talk to your family or caregiver about your bipolar disorder.
- We can assist you in finding community programs and resources in your area.
- Tips to talk with your provider and get the most out of your visit:
 1. Ask any questions you may have about your bipolar disorder. You can write them down and take them with you to your visit.
 2. Follow your provider's advice. If you have questions or concerns, let your doctor know.
 3. Make sure your provider knows what medicines you are taking.

Important screenings:

- Depression
- Other health conditions
- Preventive care screenings such as wellness checkups, mammograms and Pap tests

If you feel like you want to hurt yourself:

Get help right away! You can call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889) to talk to a trained counselor. Friends or family should call the treating psychiatrist or therapist or 911 if a person with bipolar disorder talks about or tries suicide.

For more helpful information on managing your bipolar disorder:

- [Web MD](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)



- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- Community Mental Health Centers
- Peer support groups
- Online support groups

Sources:

* The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Bipolar

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>, accessed November 8, 2013.

* National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

What is Bipolar Disorder

http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Mental_Illnesses/Bipolar1/Home_-_What_is_Bipolar_Disorder_.htm, accessed November 8, 2013.

* Publication: Bipolar Disorder

National Institute of Mental Health U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>

*Healthfinder.gov

Use Medicines Safely

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/everyday-healthy-living/safety/use-medicines-safely>, accessed November 8, 2013.

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