



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

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Self Help For Bipolar Disorder

The first thing that you can do to help yourself live with Bipolar Disorder is to become an expert on the condition. Since Bipolar is a lifetime condition, like any other medical disorders, it is essential that you and your family learn as much you can about the disorder and its treatment. Read books, attend lectures, talk to you therapist or doctor, and consider joining a support group in your area to learn from others how to manage day-to-day life and your medications.

You can help manage the minor mood swings and stresses that sometimes lead to more severe episodes by paying attention to the following:

- **SLEEP:** Maintain a stable sleep pattern by going to bed around the same time every night and getting up about the same time each morning. Disturbed sleep patterns appear to cause chemical changes in your body that trigger mood episodes. If you have trouble sleeping, or are sleeping too much, be sure to tell your doctor.
- **EXERCISE:** Maintain a regular pattern of activity. Take care not to be over-active or push yourself too hard.
- **MOOD DIARY:** Keeping track of your daily moods and “triggers” that can affect your mood is easier with a daily mood diary. It can help track your mood, medications, and things that happen to affect your mood and will help you and your doctor better understand your Bipolar condition. For you, the mood diary can help you understand yourself, notice what affects you and plan your daily activities better. At the end of each day record the following information: rate your mood episodes from mania through normal to depression; track your medications; note the amount of sleep you had the previous night; note any significant events; note side effects and/or other symptoms such as pain, anxiety, irritability, paranoia etc. When you visit your doctor you can take it is so you have a complete record of how you have been between appointments.
- **ALCOHOL & DRUGS:** don't use alcohol or drugs as these are chemicals that can cause an imbalance in your brain. This can, and often does trigger mood episodes and interfere with your medications. It may be tempting to use alcohol or drugs to cope with your mood or sleep problems, but this almost always makes matters worse. If you do have a problem with substances, ask your doctor for help and consider self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous.
- **OTHER MEDICINE:** Over the counter medications for colds, allergies and pain in even small amounts can interfere with sleep, mood or your medication. Be careful about “everyday” use of small amounts of alcohol as well as caffeine (in Cola and stimulant drinks as well as tea and coffee)
- **FAMILY SUPPORT:** Support from family and friends can help a lot. However it is important to understand that living with somebody with mood swings is not easy. By learning as much as possible about the Bipolar disorder you will be able to help reduce the inevitable stress that the condition can cause, both for the person who has it and for their loved ones. Even the “calmest” family will sometimes need outside help in dealing with the stress of a loved one who has Bipolar disorder. Family therapy and joining a support group can be very helpful.
- **WORK:** Try to reduce stress at work. We all want to perform well and do our best at work, but avoiding a relapse must be your first priority. Try to keep regular hours that will allow you to get to sleep at a reasonable time. If mood symptoms interfere with your work, discuss with your doctor whether to take some time off from work or not. What to tell employers or co-workers is ultimately up to you. If you feel unable to work, it might help to have a family member to tell you employer that you are not feeling well and are under a doctor's care and will return to work as soon as possible.

BIPOLAR HELPLINE 0800 70 80 90 or visit www.sadag.org

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