

Bipolar Disorder Factsheet

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What is Bipolar Disorder?

According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#), Bipolar Disorder “is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks.” A person with bipolar disorder experiences phases with intense emotions called ‘mood episodes’ (Manic or Depressive episodes). You can read more about the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder, as well as the four basic types, at the [National Institute of Mental Health](#).

Manic Episode

- Feel very “high” or elated
- Have trouble sleeping
- Be irritable or “touchy”
- Participate in risky behavior
- Be more active than usual
- Talk too fast about different things

Depressive Episode

- Feel “down” or hopeless
- Have trouble sleeping (too little or too much)
- Have trouble focusing
- Forget things
- Can’t enjoy their favorite activities

Myths

1. People with bipolar disorder are dangerous.

Due to a number of factors (including the media), people perceive individuals with mental illness as dangerous and volatile. This belief is also related to the portrayal of mentally ill characters in TV [who are continually linked to violence](#). In reality, however, people with bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses are [more likely to be victims of violence](#).

2. When experiencing a manic episode, people are often very happy.

The manic phase is described as a “high” or elated feeling, which can leave some people feeling happy. The [manic phase can feel different to each person](#), however, with some people entering the phase at a happy and elevated mood but becoming more irritable as the phase progresses. As the phase advances, some individuals feel as if they’re losing control in their actions.

3. It’s just mood swings - everyone gets them.

Those with bipolar disorder experience the mood swings very differently from others. The mood swings related to bipolar disorder are much more severe and longer, and they can also interfere with a person’s daily activities.

4. Bipolar Disorder is rare.

This is incorrect. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, around 5.7 million American adults live with bipolar disorder ([2.6% of the U.S. adult population](#)). Statistics for bipolar disorder in children varies because of the criteria for diagnosis. The average age of onset for bipolar disorder is 25 years of age.