

Recognizing and Managing Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder experience **episodes of depression and mania**. Mania is defined as a significant change from a person's usual behavior, including at least 3 of the following symptoms and lasting at least 4 days:

1. Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
2. Decreased need for sleep
3. Increased talkativeness
4. Racing thoughts
5. Distracted easily
6. Increased goal-directed activity or psychomotor agitation
7. Engaging in activities with potential for painful consequences (e.g., buying sprees)

Bipolar disorder often goes [unrecognized](#) in primary care. People are more likely to [seek help when they are depressed](#) than when they are experiencing a manic episode, so it is important to **consider the possibility of bipolar disorder when patients present with depression**—especially if they have a family history of bipolar, suicide, or psychosis.

[Symptoms similar to bipolar disorder](#) can occur due to substance use, medication side effects, other mental health disorders, or medical conditions. If you suspect a patient may have bipolar disorder, refer to a mental health specialist to confirm diagnosis.

Bipolar disorder can be effectively managed with **medication, psychoeducation, and therapy**. Primary care clinicians can start first-line pharmacological treatments and continue medications for those who are well managed. Detailed information is available in our [Bipolar Disorder Screening and Management tool](#).