

## Tips for Recovery: Bipolar Disorder

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP and the Client and Family Advisory Board

- 1. Be involved in your treatment. Ask Questions.** You are the expert on you. Be actively involved in setting your goals. Ask your mental health providers to explain your diagnosis, treatment choices and recommendations. Write down questions ahead of time to bring with you or invite a friend or family member to attend a session. Ask how you can learn more about bipolar disorder (see resource list).
- 2. Find your way to deal with stress.** Stress comes up in times of change. Both positive and negative events cause stress. Know your triggers so you can handle stress when you know it is coming. Focus, pace yourself, and take one thing at a time. Work or a hobby can decrease stress and increase your sense of accomplishment. Do something you like. Remember, you don't have to deal with stress on your own. Talk to someone you trust.
- 3. Taking charge of your physical health improves mental health.** Establish a healthy lifestyle. Create a routine that includes a balanced diet, enough sleep at night, and if needed, only brief naps, physical activity, and participation in hobbies. Remember, alcohol and illegal drugs can worsen symptoms. Get natural sunlight for a few minutes every day, especially in the fall and winter. See your Primary Care Provider (PCP) at least annually. If you don't have a PCP, ask your therapist for help finding one.
- 4. Be patient when searching for a medication and take bipolar medications regularly,** even if you are feeling better. It is common for people with bipolar disorder to want to stop their medication because of side effects or because you are feeling better. Maintain the progress you have made; if you go on and off of your medications, they will not work as well. It may take several tries to find what works. Tell your prescriber about side effects and benefits. Ask about medications that may have fewer side effects.
- 5. Be alert to early symptoms of mania.** Risky behaviors (spending money, risky sexual behavior, driving fast) might be signs of mania. You may be afraid to seek treatment because you like how mania feels and you're afraid of feeling flat, less capable or less creative. These fears must be weighed against the benefits of getting and staying well. You may feel good while manic but may also make choices that harm your relationships, finances, health, or work. If you feel the need to seek stimulation and be more active, it helps to do the opposite. Slow down and do less. Schedule down time. Avoid stimulants. Wait at least 72 hours to make big decisions and run it by two people who have your best interests at heart.
- 6. Be alert to early symptoms of depression.** You may feel the need to withdraw and isolate. Try doing the opposite. Reach out to others and energize. Engage in healthy activities that you have enjoyed in the past. Schedule activities for the following day, so if you wake up groggy you don't have to figure out what to do in that moment. Develop a wellness or relapse prevention plan with your therapist if you haven't already done so. This will help you identify and deal with symptoms when they first arise.
- 7. Treat suicidal thoughts seriously and know when to get help.** Talk openly about suicidal thoughts with your therapist. Get treatment as soon as possible and ask about developing a recovery or crisis plan. Share your plans with your family and friends. If you believe you can't keep yourself safe, get help right away: Call 911, go to the nearest hospital emergency room or call emergency services at your mental health center: [MHC crisis line phone number].
- 8. Stay in touch** with family, friends, and peers who are positive supports for you. You may want to isolate at times, especially when feeling depressed, but this can make symptoms worse. Learn to accept support from others. Ask your therapist for information about community peer support groups.

## Resources for Clients and Families

### Education

- National Institute of Mental Health (1.800.421.4211 or [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov) or <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (<http://www.nami.org>)
- <https://www.achievesolutions.net/achievesolutions/en//Home.do>

### Self help

- Jones, S. H., Hayward, P. & Lam, D. H. (2003). *Coping with Bipolar Disorder* (Second Edition). Oxford: Oneworld.
- Miklowitz, D. J. (2002). *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide: What You and Your Family Need to Know*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Ramirez Basco, M. (2006). *The Bipolar Workbook: Tools for Controlling Your Mood Swings*, New York: Guilford Press.
- Scott, J. (2001). *Overcoming Mood Swings*. London: Constable Robinson.

### Memoirs

- Jamison, K.R. (1995). *An unquiet mind: A memoir of moods and madness*
- Manning, Martha (1994). *Undercurrents: A life beneath the surface*

### Technology

- Search applications (Aps) for mood tracking