

MEASURE™

Modeling Effective Antipsychotic Therapeutic Success by Utilizing Real Evidence

P A T I E N T E D U C A T I O N T O O L S

Living a Healthy Life With Bipolar Disorder

A holistic approach involves adopting a lifestyle that encourages peace of mind, health, and enjoyment in life. Essential elements in this proposed treatment model include diet, nutrition, exercise, meditation, yoga, mood control techniques, and effective support systems. Individuals who adopt a holistic approach to emotional problems along with guidance from health care professionals become healthy in many areas of their lives.

TREATMENT

A good treatment plan is the foundation of a healthy lifestyle. Though it may take time to adjust to medication and therapy, they are your best defenses against symptom recurrence. Everyone has a different physical and emotional makeup, so it often takes time and patience for you and your doctor or mental health professional to find the right treatment strategy for you. It is important that you communicate your needs to your health care providers and work with them to discover the best possible approach to symptom management. Your loved ones also play an important role in your treatment plan. You can help by making them aware of your medication needs and having them watch for signs of symptom recurrence.

Once the symptoms of manic depression have been reduced through medication, other efforts should be used to start the healing process. Diet, exercise, meditation, and other techniques are more likely to be successful after symptoms have been reduced via medication. Only after these techniques are mastered and with the guidance of a knowledgeable physician or psychiatrist, should an actual reduction in medication be considered.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

During the onset of manic depression, social activities and social contacts usually suffer. When a person is depressed they tend to hide from people. Manic episodes can cause friends to retreat due to inconsistent or offensive behaviors. Part of a healthy lifestyle is being able to interact with others in a meaningful way.

After the manic depressive symptoms have stabilized, it will be easier to regain friendships and work on previous relationships. Individuals with manic depression try to save their relationships or marriages before they are healed or stabilized. Their efforts often result in driving their loved ones away. With this disorder it is important that all family members, including children, become educated in a holistic approach to treatment, help implement effective interventions, and offer as much support as possible. Fortunately there are many support groups and educative agencies available. Many support groups follow a very restrictive medical model, but holistic support groups are growing in popularity. Research your options until you find the right one.

REDUCING STRESS

Anxiety can trigger mood episodes in many people. Stress can cause or worsen symptoms of mania or depression. It is important to learn what causes your stress, ways to identify and deal with stressors, and ways to minimize your overall



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day-to-day stress level. Stress may be caused by a variety of factors, both external and internal. Repeated or constant stress can lead to tension, chronic pain, anxiety, and an inability to enjoy life. With the right treatment and therapy, you can learn to anticipate and deal with stress, and with support, you can work on breaking out of stressful patterns or situations. You must make a real effort to relax. Lying on the couch or watching TV is not enough; try something more focused, such as yoga or meditation.

RECOGNIZING AND HANDLING CAUSES OF STRESS

Learn how to recognize causes of stress, or “triggers,” such as difficult people, financial matters, noise, lack of time, or high pressure situations. Review your daily activities periodically in search of triggers you may not be aware of – look for patterns in your symptoms and stress levels. You may want to discuss your stressors with your doctor or therapist.

Keeping a journal of the time of day and what you were doing when you felt stress can be helpful. A mood calendar helps to track symptoms of mania and depression, mood swings, medications taken, and coexisting symptoms.

Develop ways to prepare yourself for stressors that cannot be avoided, such as talking with a trusted friend before dealing with a stressful situation, setting aside time to be alone after stressful incidents, or taking a break during the day for a brief rest or meditation. Whenever possible, develop ways to control when and where you deal with stressful situations or people, choosing times when you are as calm and rested as possible. Canceling or postponing a stressful encounter if you are not feeling well is a legitimate way of taking care of yourself.

COMMUNICATION

Arrange to talk to a supportive friend and set aside time to discuss stressful issues and offer guidance. When things are troubling you, talk about them with a trusted friend, family member, or health care provider before stress builds up and leads to a crisis.

If you are not ready to talk about a troubling issue, write down your feelings and thoughts in a journal. Writing can be a good release, and reading your journal entries over a period of time can give you insight into your thoughts, feelings, or behavior patterns.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Healthy sleeping, eating, and physical activity habits do not have to be complicated, depriving, or uncomfortable, and can make a big difference in the way you feel. Many people have found that simple changes, such as eliminating caffeine or taking walks regularly, have helped stabilize their moods. Though symptoms of your mood disorder may disrupt sleeping, eating, or physical activity, making things as consistent as possible (especially sleeping) can help keep your symptoms from worsening. Regular habits can also help you spot the beginning of a manic or depressive episode more quickly.

SLEEP

Lack of sleep or too much sleep can worsen moods. Keep a regular sleep schedule whenever possible. If necessary, set an alarm and try to get up at the same time every morning (even on weekends) and go to sleep around the same time every night. If you tend to have insomnia, try avoiding naps during the day since they can interfere with nighttime sleep.

Adopt bedtime rituals or ways that you can slowly wind down from your day and ease yourself into bed. Try using relaxation exercises to get to sleep. Avoid over-the-counter sleep medicines, unless your doctor has recommended them and is monitoring your use of them.



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Avoid caffeine, especially near the end of the day. Certain sodas and teas can contain as much caffeine as a cup of coffee, so be sure to check ingredients. Large meals may keep you awake; light snacks may help you sleep (milk and turkey are often helpful).

Changing the time of day you take your medication may help you sleep. Discuss your medication, its side effects, dosage, and time of day taken with your doctor.

If possible, avoid late evening or overnight work shifts. If you must work a late shift, try to work the same hours every night, so you are asleep at the same time, for the same amount of time each day.

If you wake up early in the morning and are unable to get back to sleep, it may be helpful to get out of bed and do a quiet activity like reading.

If you find yourself needing significantly more or less sleep than usual, you may be experiencing symptoms of depression or mania. Be aware of any changes in your sleep patterns and discuss them with your doctor or mental health professional.

NUTRITION AND DIET

Some medications prescribed to individuals with manic depression cause the body to gain weight. If you need to take these medications and are gaining weight, you still should work toward a healthy body. This can be accomplished by doing exercises and avoiding unhealthy foods.

If you want to diet, be sure to choose the right kind. Some diets may cause a chemical imbalance that is not good for manic depression. Before trying any diet, understand how that diet works and how it causes weight loss. Avoid crash diets that deprive you of food, or of one or more food groups. Instead of radical diets, use a combination of regular physical activity and smaller portions at mealtimes if you are concerned about your weight. When in doubt, consult your physician or psychiatrist.

Eat a variety of foods daily to get the energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber you need. Include plenty of vegetables and fruits (preferably raw) and whole grains. Moderate your intake of fat, cholesterol, sugars, and salt.

Drink at least 8 glasses (64 oz.) of water per day, more if you exercise. If you are taking certain types of medication, you may require even more water. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Be aware of changes in your appetite. Loss of appetite or overeating may be symptoms of depression. Discuss any changes with your doctor.

Don't skip meals, even if your energy and appetite are low.

If you tend to overeat, look for stressors or triggers that may cause overeating. Discuss ways to avoid or cope with these triggers with your doctor or therapist. It may be useful to write down how you are feeling or what has been happening at the time you overeat to help determine your triggers.

Have food on hand that is healthy, quick and easy to eat, such as fresh fruit, yogurt, whole grain bread, or crackers for times when you are in a hurry or don't feel like preparing a meal. Try to schedule regular grocery shopping trips so you don't have to eat fast food or junk food just because you are hungry.



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EXERCISE

The body needs exercise to stay healthy. Through perspiration, toxins that are in the body can exit through the sweat glands. Individuals with manic depressive disorders report that their moods are more stable when their bodies are fit. Choose an exercise program that makes sense to you and practice it daily. There are several types of exercise programs available and you only need one that is right for you.

Choose a method of physical activity that you enjoy and one that will not feel like a chore. You may want to choose several activities so you have variety.

Focus on making the experience as pleasant as possible. If you feel self-conscious exercising in a gym or outdoors, you can work out at home. If you need extra motivation or company, exercise with a friend or family member.

Consult your doctor before beginning any exercise regimen. Do not choose a method of exercise that puts your health at risk. Consider all of the medications you are taking and be sure that factors, such as increased heart rate and sweating, will not cause problems with your medication. You may need to take special precautions when you exercise, such as drinking extra water.

Start slowly and work up to a healthy frequency. Pace yourself so you don't run out of energy and become discouraged early.

Don't ignore your own physical limitations or exercise to the point of pain.

A good exercise goal to work toward is 30 minutes a day, 3 times per week.

Work more physical activity into your daily routine. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, get off the bus before your stop and walk an extra block, or park at the far end of the parking lot.

A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CAN BE YOURS

Paying attention and making changes to aspects of your life, such as stress management, physical fitness, medical treatment, relationships, and daily job or volunteer activities can have far-reaching positive effects on your mental and physical health. There is no right or wrong way to go about making these changes and you can make them at your own pace. The right healthy lifestyle plan is the one that works best for you.

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