

# 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

## Helping a Loved One

It's important for people with bipolar disorder to be active in their own care, but your support can be valuable in helping them cope with their condition.

For families and friends, a diagnosis of bipolar disorder can be difficult to accept. But it can also be a relief. Finally, a reason for the unpredictable mood swings has been identified, and treatment can begin.

There's no easy solution but your help can make a difference. Here are some tips that might help you cope.

- **Learn.** Go to the bookstore or the library and read about bipolar disorder. Get information from reputable Web sites. Find out about the symptoms and treatments. Learn about bipolar disorder and its causes and treatment. If possible, talk with a health care provider.
- **Recognize.** Recognize the warning signs of mania (extreme highs) and depression (extreme lows). You may notice the symptoms before the patient does. If you notice symptoms, talk to the patient in a caring manner and suggest a visit to a health care provider.
- **Listen.** Pay attention to what your loved one has to say. Don't assume that you know what he or she is going through. Don't treat your loved one's emotions and feelings as if they are all signs of an illness. Just because someone has bipolar disorder doesn't mean his or her point of view isn't valid.
- **Ask how you can help.** During bad periods, everyday things can be overwhelming to people with bipolar disorder. Reducing stress at home helps. Offering a ride to a doctor's appointment or assisting with laundry or child care can mean a lot.
- **Keep track of symptoms.** In many cases, you may notice emotional changes in your loved one before he or she does. Catching changes in mood early and getting treatment for them can make a big difference. Use of alcohol and street drugs can make symptoms worse. Help the patient understand the potential consequences.
- **Encourage your loved one to stick with treatment.** It is important that your loved one stay on his or her bipolar medication and get regular checkups. Your loved one may also need encouragement to eat well, get enough sleep, and stay away from alcohol and drugs. Encourage the patient to stay with treatment. If treatment doesn't seem to be helping, or if side effects are severe, encourage the patient to talk to his or her health care provider. If things still don't get better, consider suggesting that the patient get a second opinion.
- **Monitor.** Help monitor medication use because it can be dangerous to stop or restart a medication without a health care provider's advice.
- **Do things together.** People who are depressed often pull away from the world. Encourage your friend or loved one to get out and do things he or she enjoys. Ask him or her to join you for a walk or a dinner out. If he or she resists, don't force the issue; just gently ask again a few days later.



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- **Make an explicit plan.** Because bipolar disorder is an unpredictable illness, you should plan for bad times. Be explicit. Agree on what to do if symptoms get worse. Have a plan for emergencies. If you both know what to do and what to expect of each other, you'll feel more confident about the future. Consider using periods of stability to agree on certain safeguards. This can include hospitalization or withholding credit cards, car keys, or banking privileges. Be aware that during an episode, the patient may not comply with the agreement.
- **Work with patient.** Work with the patient to help keep health care provider appointments. Help make a list of the patient's medications (include the name of the medication, how much to take, when to take it, how to take it, and what it treats), health care providers, and phone numbers.
- **Express your own concerns.** Since your loved one's behavior can have a huge effect on you, you have the right to talk about it. However, don't blame the other person. Don't list all of his or her mistakes. Instead, focus on how your loved one's actions make you feel and how they affect you. Since this can be a very difficult subject, you might find it easiest to discuss it together with a therapist.
- **Accept your limits.** Supporting your loved one is important to his or her recovery. You have to remember that you can't single-handedly make your loved one better. You can't take care of him or her every second of the day. So get other people involved. Ask for the help of other family members or friends. Don't bear the burden on your own.
- **Take care of yourself.** It's easy to lose sight of your own needs when you're taking care of someone else, but you have to stay healthy emotionally and physically. If you push yourself too far, you'll just burn out and that's no good for anyone.

It's a difficult journey for everyone involved, but treatment and support from friends and family can go a long way to helping people recover, manage their conditions, and lead happy, healthy lives.

### REFERENCES

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