



Bipolar Disorder

In Their Shoes: Understanding What Bipolar Disorder Feels Like

Written by Brian Krans | Published on January 4, 2012
Medically Reviewed by George Krucik, MD

One man with bipolar disorder demystifies the condition for outsiders, lending his own unique perspective on mania, depression, and everything in between.



Bipolar disorder is a confusing condition, especially for someone viewing it from the outside.

Healthline talked to a 30-year-old man from California about what it's like to live with bipolar disorder. He explained he doesn't take medications, but prefers exercise, therapy, and nutritional supplements to help manage his condition.

Here, in his own words, are what it feels like to live with bipolar disorder. At his request, we've withheld his name.

Recently diagnosed with bipolar? 30+ people living with the disease have some important words for you »

Mania

The mania part is awesome. I have tons of energy and don't want to stop.

The best part of mania is that I'm so optimistic about everything. You could crash a car through my house and I'd reply, "What a great time to build something new!" I'm my most creative during this process, so I'm doing as much as possible to capitalize on it. Artistic or constructive, I'm up for anything.

I have the most fun running around and entertaining people, making them laugh, and acting like a big clown. I get a lot of satisfaction from the laughs and smiles I can get out of people. It makes me feel invincible.

Every morning I wake up ready to go, even if I didn't get much sleep the night before. I don't really need that much sleep, so I just go and go and do so much. I see all of my friends, have a blast, get everything done on my to-do list, and more.

And do I talk. I'm all over the place, dominating every conversation. I've been told I talk too fast and switch topics so quickly that it's hard for others to keep up with me. Sometimes, I can't keep up with myself.

Unfortunately, this is when I go out more, spend all of my money, and drink too much. I've been in a few fistfights during my mania, but it's not because I was really angry. Getting into a fight at a bar with some dude twice my size is exhilarating. I know it's destructive, but it's the greatest form of entertainment because it's raw, tough, and totally dangerous. I've yet to be seriously hurt in one of these fights, so I keep escalating each time. It's like a game to me.

An upside to the mania is that my sex drive goes haywire. I crave a lot more sex during this period and sometimes it's a bit much for my girlfriend.

During my mania, I feel like a god. I feel like I can do anything, so my self-worth skyrockets. I can't explain it, but when the mania burns out, I've got nothing left. Without the highs of mania, I wouldn't be able to tolerate the lows of depression.

Depression

When I'm depressed, I want to be left alone. It's not that I want to be by myself, I want everyone to disappear. I don't

want to go anywhere, see anyone, or do anything. It's like no matter what I do, people are telling me I'm doing something wrong, so the easiest way to feel better is to hide.

Seeing all those people, carrying on, living their happy little lives is an annoying reminder of my bipolar disorder and how I'll never have that kind of stability. What's worse is all the people I "entertain" while in my mania talk about how quiet I am and that I'm not entertaining. Do they try to cheer me up, or do something to make me laugh? No. They just want their clown back. It's annoying.

No matter what it is—work, hanging out with friends, exercise, etc.—I don't enjoy things because the smallest details annoy me. If friends invite me out, I imagine waiting for the bus, being cramped against angry people, waiting in lines, and all the other negative things. I think of every possible downside of something, which leaves me dreading the idea of doing anything.

I turn into this grumpy old man. I've contemplated suicide and have attempted it once before, but the more I understand the problem, the more I know that the depression is temporary and I don't always think clearly during it. That self-reminder helps me from doing anything stupid.

When I think about the future, I don't like what I see. I can only envision more troubles, endless work, and an endless string of letdowns.

The Middle

This is what I imagine it's like for everyone else, you know, normal people. I wake up in the morning and I feel fine. I don't dread going about my day. I go to work, get things done, and have plenty of energy throughout the day.

I can roll with the punches the average day gives me. I'm not freaking out over small problems, I enjoy the little things, and I'm not loathing the future.

I feel normal and it's how I see myself. I'm not some lunatic running around or some mopey, lazy slug.

I honestly wish I could stay in this mindset all of the time, but I know that won't happen. I've accepted that my moods will change on their own, so I enjoy the calm more when it's there.

Copyright © 2005 - 2018 Healthline Networks, Inc. All rights reserved. Healthline is for informational purposes and should not be considered medical advice, diagnosis or treatment recommendations.