Heads Up – Bipolar Disorder

What helps? - Self-Management

An important way of managing a problem is to begin with a thorough understanding of it. It is only after understanding the problem that we can then begin to tackle it. Many people find that educating themselves about the condition and how it affects them, increases their sense of control.

Self management is not the same as having to deal with all of your difficulties on your own. Most people who experience symptoms of bipolar disorder engage in self management alongside ongoing contact and support from mental health services, family and other supports.

Self-management involves taking a more active role in understanding and recognising your own 'warning signs' of relapse and controlling and managing symptom changes. At first, some aspects of self-management can sound overwhelming or daunting. However, skills can be developed gradually and have the potential to increase a person's sense of control over the management of symptoms.

Pros and Cons of Self Management

There are degrees of severity of bipolar mood swings. Sometimes people regard hypomanic periods as something they have found useful, productive or enjoyable. If this is the case for you, it might make you uncertain about seeking help or using the self-management techniques below. It might be useful for you to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of hypomania using the table below. It may help for you to ask a trusted friend / family member to see what other people see as the advantages or disadvantages of hypomania. You can then weigh up if you would benefit from addressing any issues, and making sure you don't have a 'rose-tinted' (overly positive) view of these periods.

| Hypomania | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|------------|------------|---------------|
| Short term | | |
| Long-term | | |

Life Events - Triggers to mood episodes

Developing an understanding and awareness of typical triggers to depression and mania is an important and helpful step in self management.

Depression is often triggered by loss, sense of failure, or feeling trapped in a difficult situation. Elated mood patterns can emerge with positive life events, such as success, exciting possibilities, and becoming highly driven to achieve a positive personal goal.

It is important to become aware of what may have been going on in the background of your life in the weeks or months before things have previously progressed to depression or mania. In this way, you might learn that there have been situational factors in your life that may make you at higher risk of a depressive or manic episode and learning other ways to respond to these life events / triggers is important.

If people have had a number of periods of depression and mania, the end of these phases can themselves be a trigger for further mood changes. For example, cramming in activity and trying to be productive after a period of depression can lead to lifestyle factors (poor sleep, over activity) which place people at risk of further mood changes. Drawing a timeline can help identify any link between life events and the beginning of mood changes. You can do this by creating a chart with mood changes tracked over a period of weeks or months, rated from + 10 (elated) to -10 (depressed). Underneath this do your best to remember 'what was going on in my life' (e.g. relationships, work, study, hearing news, a new friendship, a social event) when your moods were changing.

