Bipolar Disorder Facts

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that causes extreme mood swings, including emotional highs (hypomania and mania) and lows (depression). These mood swings can affect sleep, energy, activity, judgment, behavior, and the ability to think clearly.

Symptoms of a Manic Episode

A manic episode is a period of at least one week when a resident has elated mood and/or irritable mood most of the day for most days and possesses more energy than usual. A hypomanic episode is a less severe form of mania that will persist for at least four consecutive days.

Symptoms of a manic and a hypomanic episode are the same. However, symptoms of hypomania are less intense. At least three of the following changes in behavior will occur:

- Decreased need for sleep
- Increased or faster speech
- Uncontrollable racing thoughts or quickly changing ideas or topics when speaking
- Distractibility
- Increased activity
- Increased risky behavior
- Grandiosity

Symptoms of a Depressive Episode

A major depressive episode is a period of at least two weeks in which a resident has at least five of the following symptoms, including at least one of the first two symptoms:

- Sadness or despair
- Loss of interest in activities the resident once enjoyed
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Fatigue
- Increased or decreased sleep
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Restlessness or slowed speech or movement
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide

Supporting Documentation in the Medical Record

A diagnosis can only be made by a qualified health professional. Supporting documentation in the medical record should include, but is not limited to, a psychiatric evaluation, a physical examination, and relevant tests and screenings to help rule out other possible causes of symptoms. Regular audits, especially upon admission, should confirm that this documentation is complete, timely, and accurate.

Health Services Advisory Group (HSAG) is the West Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO) Region 7.
Sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/what-is-mental-health/conditions/bipolar and the National Institute of Mental Health www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder.

This material was prepared by the Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health in Nursing Facilities. This work is made possible by grant number 1H79SM087155 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. August 2025. This material has been adapted with permission by Health Services Advisory Group (HSAG), a Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO) under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of CMS or HHS, and any reference to a specific product or entity herein does not constitute endorsement of that product or entity by CMS or HHS. Publication No. QN-13SOW-XC-09222026-06