

BIPOLAR DEPRESSION

TREATMENT MENU

Antidepressant medication usually does not impact the brain during bipolar depression, but fortunately there are many approaches which can treat and prevent this condition.

LIFESTYLE

WALKING

Walking briskly 30 minutes a day causes similar changes in the brain as antidepressants. Swimming, dancing and other aerobic activity will have the same effect, and three 10-minute chunks works equally well.

WAKING

Waking at the same time each day (within 30 minutes) helps medication work better by setting your brain's circadian clock.

ACTIVITY

A mix of social, enjoyable, and goal-directed activity is important. Start light so it's not overwhelming; more ideas at www.moodtreatmentcenter.com/activation.htm

MEDICINE

LAMOTRIGINE

Benefits: prevents depression and mood swings, almost no side effects.

Risks: severe allergic rash (Stevens-Johnson)

LITHIUM

Benefits: very effective for depression and mania; prevents suicide; strengthens brain cells. Well tolerated in lower doses (for depression).

Risks: nausea, tremor, thirst, low thyroid, kidney problems.

ATYPICALS

Examples: Quetiapine, lurasidone, olanzapine-fluoxetine combination.

Benefits: very effective for depression, anxiety, sleep and mania.

Risks: weight gain, drowsiness, restlessness, diabetes, high cholesterol, tardive dyskinesia (permanent muscle twitching).

DOPAMINE AGENTS

Examples: Pramipexole, ropinorole, rotigotine

Benefits: very effective for depression, motivation, restless legs.

Risks: nausea, drowsiness, compulsive behavior.

NOVEL STIMULANTS

Examples: modafinil, armodafinil

Benefits: work quickly for depression, fatigue, concentration.

Risks: anxiety, headache, insomnia.

ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Examples: bupropion, SSRIs, MAOIs

Benefits: help about 15% of people with bipolar depression

Risks: worsening of mood, mania, suicidality, sexual dysfunction, anxiety.

MOOD STABILIZERS

Examples: valproate, carbamazepine, oxcarbazepine, aripiprazole, risperidone.

Benefits: these agents treat mania and help prevent depression (valproate may also treat depression).

Risks: depending on agent, may have weight gain, drowsiness, and medical risks.

NATURAL

N-ACETYLCYSTEINE (NAC)

Mechanism: antioxidant, brain protection.

Benefits: depression, concentration, addictions.

Dose: 1,000-2,000mg daily.

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Mechanism: coats and protects brain cells; found in fish (salmon) and green leafy vegetables.

Benefits: prevents depression, mania, irritability.

Dose: 1,000-5,000mg daily of DHA + EPA

INOSITOL (VITAMIN B8)

Mechanism: improves brain-cell signaling.

Benefits: depression, anxiety.

Dose: 5-25 grams/day

LIGHTBOX

Mechanism: enhances serotonin and sets biological clock.

Benefits: winter depression, possibly non-winter too.

Dose: 10,000 lux lightbox used for 15-30 minutes in the morning (e.g. DayLight XL).

THERAPY

SOCIAL RHYTHM THERAPY

Through mood charting, clients learn which daily routines help stabilize their mood. The therapist also helps client build new skills to overcome the effects of bipolar on relationships and identity.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Depression can influence your thoughts and actions, and this therapy helps people break free from those patterns. Clients use journaling to identify and question their depressive thoughts.

FAMILY THERAPY

The therapist helps families live more effectively with mood problems in the home. Conflict resolution and specific communication skills are taught.

EDUCATIONAL GROUP

In this weekly seminar a therapist teaches skills to live more effectively with bipolar. Much of the learning comes from other patients who have struggled with bipolar

SUPPORT GROUPS

Several local groups meet regularly to share information and support on living with bipolar: Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), First Presbyterian Church (for families and patients). The Mental Health Association keeps a listing of meeting times: www.triadmentalhealth.org.