



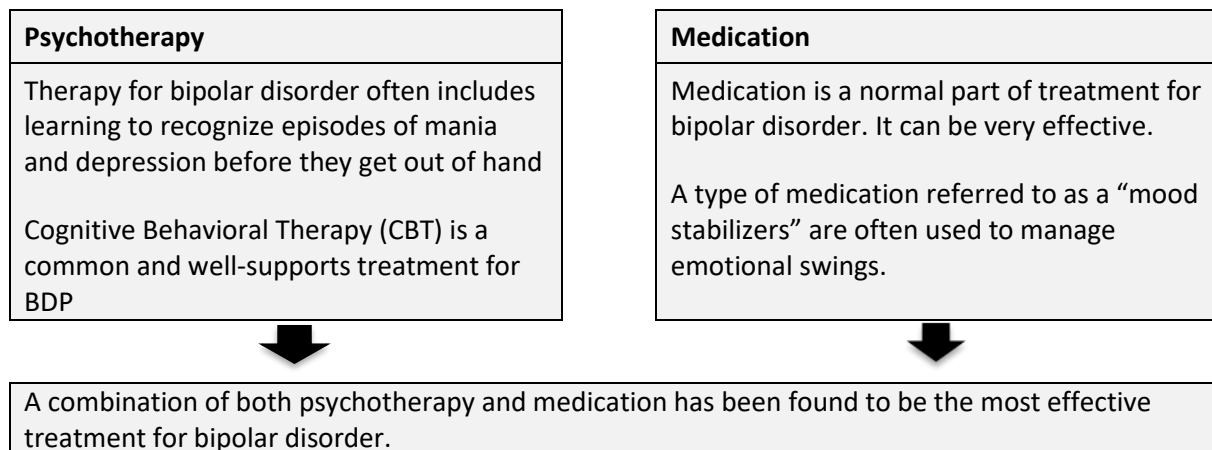
# What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness defined by extreme emotional highs (mania) and lows (depression). Treatment usually includes a combination of psychotherapy and medication.

 <b>Depression (the “lows”)</b>	 <b>Mania (the “highs”)</b>
Typically last at least 2 weeks Symptoms must cause impairment	Typically last at least 1 week Symptoms must cause impairment
Depressed mood Social withdrawal Loss of interest or pleasure Recurring thoughts of death Fatigue nearly every day	Increase in goal-directed behaviour Inflated self-esteem and euphoria Racing Thoughts Pleasure-seeking without regard for consequences Decrease need for sleep

## What does mania really look like?

During mania, people lose the ability to make rational decisions. Common behaviors include emptying bank accounts for an immediate thrill, leaving a loving spouse, or using dangerous drugs. Imagine your body has a motor—which you can’t turn off – that’s pushing you through bad decision after bad decision. When the motor finally shuts off, the damage has already been done.



## Common Misconceptions

### “I sometimes feel really sad one minute, then happy the next. Is this bipolar disorder?”

The ups-and-downs of bipolar disorder are *usually* longer lasting than people think. Periods of depression typically last two weeks or more, while mania last a week or more. The symptoms of bipolar disorder are also much more extreme than regular mood swings.

### “People are happy when they’re manic.”

Sometimes, but mania is usually a scary experience. Mania often comes with feelings of irritability and being unable to stop or slow down. Plus mania almost always end poorly.

### “Someone with bipolar disorder shouldn’t use anti-depressants because they’ll become manic.”

The decision to use anti-depressants should be made on a case-by-case basis by a doctor. Oftentimes, the benefits of anti-depressants far outweigh the risks, and they are an essential part of treatment.