

## What doctors don't tell you about Bipolar Disorder

What does the DSM-V say about [bipolar disorder](#)?

It says [many things](#), like you must have at least three behaviours from a list of symptoms of mania lasting a week or longer. It says you must have five behaviours from a list of symptoms for [depression](#) lasting two weeks or longer. These behaviours include a markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day nearly every day for depression, and an inflated sense of self-esteem or grandiosity (ranging from uncritical self-confidence to a delusional sense of expertise) for mania.

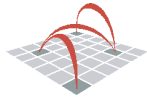
So once you've displayed these behaviours, you can be diagnosed and treated. The doctors often tell you side-effects of medications and how often to take the meds, but in my experience, they rarely explain what your diagnosis means, perhaps instead offering you a handout on bipolar disorder, or advising you to check a reputable website.

They don't tell you what to really expect with your disorder.

They rarely tell you mania doesn't always look like a euphoric high, that it can look like your worst nightmare, with major irritability and lashing out at loved ones without you knowing why.

They don't tell you that you can have mixed episodes, which involve a mixture of depression and mania.

They don't tell you the "minimal" effects, like weight gain or drowsiness, affect many people — and can be real and life-altering. For example, drowsiness I've experienced as a side-effect of Seroquel doesn't just make me tired, it turns me into a non-functioning zombie for days at a time.



They don't tell you there's no silver bullet when it comes to meds, that what you try first will rarely work. That you'll be playing medication roulette until you find the right combo. Yes, that's right "combo." It's not often you're only put on one medication to control your symptoms.

Nowhere was it mentioned to me that you might miss your highs and struggle to stay medication-compliant because your creativity is gone and you hate it.

This sounds gloomy, I know, but there are also positives to a bipolar diagnosis they don't often tell you about.

They don't tell you you're joining the ranks of awesome people, like Carrie Fisher, Vincent van Gogh, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Russell Brand and Demi Lovato.

They don't tell you just how awesome it can be to finally have a name for what you're going through.

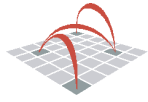
They don't tell you how wonderful a night of sleep can be once you're on the right dose of medications.

They don't tell you how wonderful life can be once you're free of the demons in your head.

They don't tell you being bipolar is not a death sentence, that you can live and thrive with it, no matter how you feel at the time of diagnosis.

They don't tell you there is hope of recovery and remission of your symptoms. Well, maybe they do tell you that, but you might have missed it, reeling from everything else they told you. And it never hurts to be reminded of that.

So those are some things your doctor might not mention.



It never hurts to do your homework and research your diagnosis, because knowledge is power. The more informed you are as a patient, the better you can advocate for yourself. And that's really the best thing a person with any illness can do.

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