

Preventing Mania

Behavioral Changes in Mania

One of the hallmarks of bipolar disorder is the distinctive behavioral changes that take place when a patient begins to experience hypomania and mania. Activity levels and libido increase and hours spent in sleep decrease. This cycle of increased activity and decreased sleep (or physical rest) can itself perpetuate and escalate the mania.

These changes in activity levels usually begin slowly and build over time. As such, activity levels can be used as a measure for tracking the progression of the elevation in mood. When you recognize that your mood begins to be elevated, it is important to begin monitoring your activity levels. If your activity levels begin to consistently and progressively increase, your early intervention strategies should be activated to prevent a full-blown episode of mania. Here are two strategies you can incorporate into your early intervention plan.

Preventing Sleep Disruption

Research has shown that sleep deprivation can be both a trigger to, and a consequence of mania. Some patients find that with little or no sleep, they become exhausted, but cannot slow down enough to fall asleep. These symptoms may escalate into a full blown episode of mania and possibly psychosis. Other bipolar patients may enjoy the increased energy but find that this level of energy and activity cannot be sustained without negative consequences, such as irritability and paranoia.

The best strategy for coping with sleep disruption is to prevent it. If it is possible, try to forecast or identify times when your normal sleeping habits are likely to be disrupted (e.g., having to rush for a deadline travelling, going on vacation, etc.)

Check out our information on sleep hygiene to help avoid sleep problems.

Limiting Your Activities

Besides pharmacological intervention, there are some strategies you can implement to prevent mild or moderate mood elevation from becoming a full-blown manic episode. The key principle for any behavioral intervention for preventing mania is to limit activity and to keep activity levels in a "normal" range. While you are well, plan and organize your regular week and ensure that there is a balance of responsibilities, pleasant activities, and time for sleep and rest. Try to keep to this schedule as closely as possible. Then, when you begin to suspect that your mood might be becoming elevated monitor your activity level and compare it to your planned balanced schedule. If you find that your levels have increased significantly, try to get yourself to slow down and return to your planned schedule. You may need to ask a family member or friend to help you with this.

So remember...

Preventing mania is all about slowing yourself down, relaxing, and having enough rest. These are things you could easily do once you recognize some of your early warning signs. For example, if you realize that you are beginning to feel a little keyed up and restless or more energetic, you could take a slow and relaxing walk somewhere nice or take a long bath. These strategies are recommended not to stop you from feeling happy but to prevent your good mood from escalating to mania. Many bipolar patients have said they love it when their mood is slightly elevated but do not enjoy the experience of full-blown mania. This is where you can learn to better manage your moods so that you can prevent them from escalating to full-blown manic episodes.