

preventing mania

Behavioural Changes in Mania

One of the hallmarks of bipolar disorder is the distinctive behavioural 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 begins slowly and builds over time. As such, activity levels can be used as a measure for tracking the progression of the elevation in mood. When you recognise 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 (symptom) 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 and vigour, 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 (eg, when having to rush for a deadline, travelling, going on holidays, etc.)

Here are some good sleeping habits to maintain, so that you can prevent a hypomanic or manic episode:

- going to bed and waking up at the same times each day
- avoid napping if it causes night-time insomnia (or don't take too long a nap)
- try to minimise sleep disruptions (eg, share night-time responsibilities, bring favourite pillow on holiday, use ear plugs or eye shields, or medications)
- avoid overstimulation (eg, too much physical activity before bedtime, caffeine)
- avoid thinking too much at night (do some relaxation exercises or calming activities)



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 behavioural intervention for preventing mania is to limit activity and to keep activity levels to a “normal” level. While you are well, plan and organise your regular week and ensure that there is a balance of responsibilities, pleasant activities, and time for sleep and/or 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 “normal” and balanced schedule. If you find that your activity levels have increased significantly, try to get yourself to slow down and return to your normal weekly schedule. You could also ask a friend or family member to help you do 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 recognise some of your early warning signs. For example, if you realise that you're 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 nice long bath. These strategies are recommended not to stop you from feeling happy but to prevent your good mood from escalating toward 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 episodes.