

## Ideas for Children with BiPolar (Prevention or Mitigation)

(from an ADDitude Magazine article by Devon Frye, updated Mar. 31, 2022)

The following can be used before the onset of BiPolar in a child who is showing the pre-cursor signs of BPD, i.e. extreme separation anxiety, long drawn out melt downs that seem extreme, etc.

- CBT:
  1. Learn possible triggers for mania or depression, and talk through their thinking processes to identify distortions that may be negatively impacting their view of a situation.
  2. Patients also learn coping mechanisms and relaxation techniques to — ideally — stop episodes in their tracks.
    - a. RAIN
    - b. TIPP
    - c. Mindfulness
    - d. Progressive Muscle Relaxation
    - e. Diaphragmatic Breathing.

When applied effectively, CBT can help patients improve . . .relationships, and greatly reduces their chance of relapse.

Don't use CBT during an episode. Wait until child is more stable.

- DIET and SUPPLEMENTS:

DO's: A healthy bipolar diet includes the following:

- **Omega-3s:** Multiple studies have shown that Omega-3 fatty acids like the kinds found in fish and fish oil supplements can help decrease the feelings of depression so common in bipolar patients. Vegetarian? Try getting your Omega-3s from eggs or nuts instead.
- **Magnesium:** Magnesium — found in whole grains, beans, and dark leafy vegetables like spinach — has been shown to have an effect similar to lithium, the most common bipolar medication. Upping your intake of magnesium, a natural mood stabilizer, may decrease your need for medication. (Always talk to your doctor first.)
- **Healthy Fats:** Healthy fats like those found in avocados and olive oil won't have any effect on your bipolar symptoms themselves, but they can help keep you feeling full longer and decrease your cravings for the "foods to avoid" listed below.

DON'Ts: Individuals with bipolar disorder should cut back on the following:

- **Caffeine:** Caffeine and other stimulants can kick mania up a notch. When experiencing a manic phase, avoid coffee, soda, and energy drinks. Try herbal teas or infused water instead — the herbs can give you a natural energy boost to overcome slumps.
- **Sugar:** Sugar highs and lows can make an already unbalanced mood even more erratic, and sugar crashes can make a depressive phase much worse. If you really need something sweet, reach for fruit — the natural sugars won't cause such a drastic blood sugar spike.
- **Refined Carbohydrates:** Bipolar patients may be more prone to obesity, since imbalances of serotonin in their brains may lead them to crave more unhealthy carbohydrates. Ditch the processed junk and get your carbs from whole grains, fruits, and vegetables instead.
- **Treating Bipolar Disorder with Lifestyle Changes**
  - **Exercise:** Though there is little hard data behind it, anecdotal evidence suggest that getting regular exercise and following a proper sleep schedule can have positive effects on bipolar symptoms, too — at least during a depressive phase. At the very least, [one study](#) found a correlation between a sedentary lifestyle and an increased risk of bipolar episodes [a trigger?] indicating there may be some connection between low activity levels and difficult bipolar symptoms.

Since exercise boosts endorphins, it seems to have the most positive effects during depressive phases, helping patients who are not being treated with medication lift their moods. For the same reason, however, some patients find that it tends to exacerbate their manic phases — meaning a dangerous high can go from bad to worse thanks to a big rush of endorphins.

- **SLEEP:** Sleep disturbance is a common symptom of untreated bipolar disorder, it can be a chicken-egg situation — are you not getting enough sleep because escalating symptoms are keeping you up, or are your symptoms getting worse because you're not getting enough sleep? Regardless, working toward restoring a normal sleep cycle can help you manage symptoms and feel more in control during a manic phase. CBT can — and often does — help with this, but there are at-home solutions you can try on your own:

**Keep a sleep diary:** Track when you go to sleep, how long it takes you to fall asleep, how well you slept, and what time you wake up. This will help you notice patterns and identify triggers for poor sleep — and if you're tracking your moods as well, can help you identify whether sleep problems preceded a mood swing, or vice versa.

**Create a perfect sleep environment:** Make your room as dark as possible, and keep the room cool. Try to go to bed at the same time every night, even on the weekend. Visualization and relaxation exercises can also help someone with bipolar disorder quiet a racing mind and fall asleep.

- **Avoid alcohol and caffeine:** As mentioned above, alcohol and caffeine can affect your sleep cycle in a negative way — even more than they would a neurotypical person.

## AFTER DIAGNOSIS:

### Medication:

- Dr. Daniel Amen has recommended NOT to use Lithium for children (tardive dyskinesia) or Benzodiazapines (addictive), but talk with your doctor and research before making any decisions.
- Look carefully into Abilify for children. It's an anti-psychotic that has been proven to be well-tolerated in children with lower side effects than other anti-psychotics. Look carefully into other recommended mood stabilizers and anti-psychotic medications used to treat bipolar in children.
- **Salt:** Seems counterintuitive, right? Many people who are trying to “eat healthy” try to dramatically lower their salt intake, but this isn't necessarily the best idea — especially if you have bipolar disorder. Once you start treatment, don't let your salt intake get too low, and definitely don't cut out salt entirely — salt is very necessary to regulate the levels of bipolar medication in your bloodstream.
- **No Alcohol:** Alcohol and bipolar disorder just don't mix. Not only can alcohol interact poorly with psychiatric medications, it can also disrupt sleep — bad news for an already high-strung bipolar person. Bipolar patients are also more likely than neurotypical people to develop drug or alcohol addictions. In other words, alcohol is not worth the risk.
- **Grapefruit:** Talk to your doctor about your specific situation, but some bipolar medications — particularly anticonvulsants — interact poorly with grapefruit and grapefruit juice.

- **EXERCISE**

For patients who are being treated with medications, regular exercise can help combat the weight gain that can be an unwelcome side effect. Patients taking lithium, however, should talk to their doctor before embarking on an exercise plan — the medication can affect your salt levels and potentially dehydrate you if proper precautions aren't taken. Make sure you eat a healthy level of salt and drink a lot of water if you plan to exercise while taking lithium.

### **Reference**

Faedda, G., Marangoni, C., Serra, G., Salvatore, P., Sani, G., Vázquez, G., Tondo, L., Girardi, P., Baldessarini, R., Koukopoulos, A. (2015, May). Precursors of bipolar disorders: a systematic literature review of prospective studies. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 76(5), 614-24. Doi: 10.4088/JCP.13r08900. PMID: 26035191.

### **BOOKS**

#1 *The Bipolar Child: The Definitive and Reassuring Guide to Childhood's Most Misunderstood Disorder—Third Edition*

*By Demetri Papolos, MD and Janice Papolos, (Broadway Books, New York, 2007)*

*The Bipolar Child* “is rich with the voices of parents, siblings, and the children themselves. The Papoloses comprehensively detail the diagnosis, explain how to find good treatment, and advise parents about ways to advocate effectively for their children.” There’s also information on promising new drugs, greater insight into the **special concerns of teens** and additional sections on the impact of the illness on the family.

#2 *What Works For Bipolar Kids: Help and Hope For Parents*

*by Mani Pavuluri (Guilford Press, New York, 2008)*

Drawing on 20 years of experience with kids having bipolar disorder and their families, expert clinician and renowned researcher **Mani Pavuluri** delivers proven strategies for reducing or eliminating problems with mania, aggression, sleep disturbances, depression, and other challenges of childhood bipolar disorder.

### **#3 The Bipolar Teen: What You Can Do to Help Your Child and Your Family**

*by David J. Miklowitz, Ph.D. and Elizabeth L. George, Ph.D. (Guilford Press, 2007)*

From the bestselling author of *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide*, *The Bipolar Teen* offers practical tools to manage chaos and relieve stress so the entire family can find stability and support. The book delivers strategies to spot the differences between normal teenage behavior and the telltale **symptoms of mania and depression**.

### **#4 Survival Strategies for Parenting Children with Bipolar Disorder: Innovative Parenting and Counseling Techniques for Helping Children with Bipolar Disorder and the Conditions That May Occur With It**

*by George T. Lynn (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000)*

A definitive guide covering all aspects of bipolar in children, from spotting the symptoms to getting the correct interventions to help cope with the condition. Lynn delivers guidance to separate the symptoms from those of **other co-morbid conditions**, providing various case histories, which also serve to help parents cope, and the child to live with bipolar.

### **#5 Mommy I'm Still In Here: Raising Children With Bipolar Disorder**

*By Kate McLaughlin (Behler Publications, 2008)*

McLaughlin paints a candid picture of raising a teen with bipolar disorder, sharing the realities of denial, fear, frustration and disappointment, as well as understanding, acceptance, and love. This book has been described as an honest conveyance of “the physical realities and battered emotions of a family caught in the swirling storm of a child’s hallucinations and psychosis,” in an effort to destroy “shame-based assumptions.” She also offers hope and encouragement to anyone living with a chronic illness or raising teens.

#### **#6 New Hope for Children and Teens with Bipolar Disorder: Your Friendly Authoritative Guide to the Latest in Traditional and Complementary Solutions**

*By Boris Birmaher, MD (Harmony, 2004)*

Boris Birmaher, MD and professor of psychiatry, is one of the country’s top researchers in the field of child and adolescent bipolar disorder. From the inside flap: “This ‘life-changing book’ dispels myths about bipolar and offers real solutions, delivers keen insights like the causes of the disease, the path and outcome of **bipolar in children and teens** and the latest biological treatments and psychosocial therapist and how to use them.”

#### **#7 The Bipolar Handbook for Children, Teens, and Families: Real-Life Questions with Up-to-Date Answers**

*by Wes Burgess, MD, Ph.D., (Avery, 2008)*

Dr. Burgess is a practicing psychiatrist specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of bipolar and has helped “countless children and teens navigate the minefield of mania and depression.” Burgess draws on real questions (more than 500) from patients, parents and **families of children with bipolar** to

answer every aspect of the disorder: causes, medical treatment, psychotherapy, strategies for preventing, coping with, and treating bipolar episodes.

## #8 Bipolar Kids: Helping Your Child Find Calm in the Mood Storm

*by Rosalie Greenberg, MD, (Da Capo Press, reprint ed. 2008)*

Dr. Greenberg is a child psychiatrist with 25 years experience, specializing in juvenile bipolar disorder. “The book wades through the intricacies of the complex condition of bipolar—sifting through the ‘diagnostic morass’ of children who also suffer with autism or Asperger’s syndrome. Parents will learn a multitude of hidden symptoms, including impulsivity, difficulty waking up, nightmares, anxiety, hypersexuality, carb cravings and sinus infections.”

## #9 Bipolar Children: Cutting-Edge Controversy, Insight, and Research (Childhood in America)

*by Sharna Olfman, Ph.D. (Praeger, 2007)*

Dr. Sharma Olfman is a professor of developmental psychology, a private psychologist and has written and lectured widely on the subjects of children’s mental health and parenting. In this book, Olfman leads a team of widely known experts who examine the astonishing rise in the diagnosis of **pediatric bipolar disorder**. The contributors identify and explain complex and interrelated factors that have set the stage for this epidemic.

