

Bipolar Mood Disorder (manic-depression)

A handy chart to help you compare the medicines to help the symptoms of bipolar mood disorder

You might also want to look at the Handy Charts for bipolar depression and bipolar mania

Please note: You are unique and this is only a guide!

This guide will be about right for most people, but not everyone. Some people may get better but some may stay the same. Some may improve quicker than other people. Some may get all the side effects in the book, others none at all. What happens to you will depend on your unique brain and your genes. However, this guide should help you to be able to start to choose between the many medicines. There are many other ways you can be helped e.g. talking therapies, help with coping with the symptoms, relaxation, and self-help.

No guide can be 100% unbiased, but we have tried hard to stick to the facts about medicines. We hope you take this guide in the way in which it is intended i.e. an honest attempt to inform, educate and help.

What the sections in the table mean:

Medicine – these are the main medicines to help treat the symptoms of **bipolar mood disorder**, and a few others that are sometimes used.

- These medicines are in no special order. Some can help bipolar depression coming back, others help prevent bipolar mania coming back
- We have listed them as their “generic name” (the name of the actual drug).
- This is only a short guide. Please see the rest of our website for more details
- Not all these medicines work as well as each other. Your clinician may be able to help you choose which one (or ones) might be best for you.

Usual dose per day – this will depend on how well you do and what side effects you get. Some people need higher, some need lower doses. It is usually best to start a drug slowly; it's kinder to your brain.

How we think it might work – this is how we think the medicine works in the brain. There is more on this on our website. Taking two medicines with the same way of working doesn't often help much. Dopamine and GABA are two of the brain's chemical messengers. Dopamine has many effects but too much can lead to psychosis, delusions and overactivity. GABA helps calm the brain.

How long it takes to work – this is just a guide as some people may get better quicker or slower. But don't give up too early.

Some of the main side effects – these are just a few of the main side effects. Many are worse at higher doses, but most wear off after a few weeks.

- = Most people will get this side effect
- = Quite a few will get this side effect
- = Only a few people will get this side effect
- = This is very rare or not known

The side effects here are:

- **Drowsiness** – feeling sleepy or doped up
- **Weight gain** – feeling more hungry and putting on weight
- **Stomach upset** – feeling sick, but not usually being sick

There are many other possible side effects.

Please see our website for more details of each of the medicines and side effects.

How long you could or should take it for - how long you take any medicine for will be up to you. Taking a medicine means remembering every day and may be also getting some side effects. It also often means you get well and stay well. You will need to decide what helps you best and what helps you get on with your life.

How to stop it – some medicines can be stopped quickly. Others should be stopped slowly. It is best to try to stop all medicines slowly – it's kinder to your brain.

Tips on how to get the best out of medication:

- Read our website to make sure you know what the medicine is for, when and how to take it and for how long to take it
- Try to get the best out of one medicine before trying another. Get the right dose for you, try taking it at different times, and try to cope with any side effects
- Take it regularly every day (*find ways to remember e.g. leave the pack by your bed, in the kitchen, next to your toothbrush, in your car if you have one, next to the TV or computer, but don't forget to keep them out of the sight and reach of children*)
- Although medicines can help most people's symptoms, they are not always the only answer. Please see our website for ideas for self-help, and help from others

A handy chart to help you compare the medicines to help the symptoms of bipolar mood disorder

Medicine	Usual dose	How we think it might work (probably)	How long it takes to work	Some of the main side effects *				How long you could or should take it for	How to stop it
				Drowsi-ness	Weight gain	Stomach upset	Other main side effects		
Main medicines (licensed or which are proven to help)									
Lithium *‡	Around 400-1000mg a day, but depends on your blood level	We don't really know, but it does a lot of different things in the brain	May take several months for the full effect	●	●●	●●	Tremor, passing lots of urine, feeling thirsty. You will need a blood test every 3 months or so.	Often many years, and at least two years	Must be done slowly over at least 4 weeks. It is better stopped over several months
Olanzapine *	10-20mg a day	We don't really know but it blocks the effect of dopamine	May take several months	●●●	●●●	0	Diabetes	Often for many years	Should be no problem
Aripiprazole * (Abilify®)	15-30mg a day	Regulates dopamine	May take several months	●	0	●	Constipation, headache, poor sleep, tremor, feeling restless		
Quetiapine *‡	300-600mg a day	We don't really know but it blocks dopamine receptors	May take several months	●●	●	●	Hypotension (feeling dizzy when you stand up)		Should be no problem
Lamotrigine ‡	50-200mg a day	We don't really know	May take many months. It also needs to be started slowly	●●	●	0	Headache, feeling dizzy or sick, skin rashes.		Should be no problem
Carbamazepine *	400-1000mg a day	Calms the spread of stimulating messages in brain	May take several months	●●	0	●●	Blurred vision, dizziness	Often for many years	Best stopped slowly over several weeks
Valproate * (e.g. Depakote®)	Around 400-1000mg a day	Boosts the action of GABA and other messengers	May take several months	●	●●	●●	Nausea		Best stopped slowly over several weeks

* These medicines mainly help to stop bipolar mania coming back, if you got better with that medicine when you were high.

‡ These medicines mainly help to stop bipolar depression coming back, if you got better with that medicine when you were low.

* See other page for more advice about these side effects.