Regain Your Self-Esteem

In bipolar disorder, moods swing from depression to mania, or a state of elation, and often leave people with low self-esteem. These feelings can start from being self-conscious about the condition and progress to feelings of lower self-worth. However, understanding bipolar as a disease, and receiving proper treatment, can help you overcome these emotional setbacks.

How Bipolar Disorder Engenders Low Self-Esteem

People with bipolar disorder may feel embarrassed, ashamed, or confused about their condition. The emotional baggage and social stigma associated with having a psychiatric illness can significantly affect a person’s self-esteem, explains Stephen F. Pariser, MD, a professor of psychiatry at the Ohio State University College of Medicine in Columbus.

Self-esteem issues can be exacerbated by episodes of depression. "People who feel depressed feel worthless and have a sense that everything they do is not as good as it could be," says Dr. Pariser. They can feel inadequate in their work or at school and in their relationships — even though these perceptions are not true reflections of their abilities or worth.

Furthermore, the prospect of having to deal with a complex mental condition and take medications over the long term, often for a lifetime, can lead to a sense of hopelessness. For people with bipolar disorder, it’s important to instead look at bipolar treatment as a source of hope for living a healthy and fulfilling life with the condition.

How Bipolar Disorder Affects Self-Confidence

A chronic mental condition such as bipolar disorder can affect how well someone is able to function and, in turn, that person's quality of life, says Pariser. Specifically, the varying emotional ups and downs related to bipolar disorder affect a person's lifestyle and behavior. "The cyclicity of bipolar disorder — that people have mood swings — can have a very negative impact on interpersonal relationships with family, friends, lovers, jobs," says Pariser, and this can "have very difficult consequences," including feelings of rejection and damaged confidence.

Bipolar disorder tends to strike during a person's formative years — in early adulthood, adolescence, or at an even younger age — which "can really impact the evolution of the person," adds Pariser,
and affect the person's belief in his or her potential. This is why early bipolar treatment and a strong support system are crucial to managing bipolar disorder.

**Treating Bipolar and Building Self-Worth**

Treatment for bipolar disorder should address all the condition's associated symptoms and side effects, including low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Treating the condition can help you regain a sense of control. With medication and therapy, bipolar episodes can be managed and self-esteem can be built as you start to feel confident about your ability to function and as the sense of hopelessness about your condition begins to lift.

Regular visits with a psychiatrist are an important part of staying on top of symptoms and addressing any issues of self-esteem. Even if your symptoms are well-controlled, seeing your psychiatrist at least a few times a year is recommended.

Here are additional steps you can take to feel better about yourself while coping with bipolar disorder:

- Understand that your bipolar disorder is no one's fault — not yours or anyone else's.
- Know that there are things you can't change about yourself, and then accept them.
- Think about the abilities you have and the traits you like about yourself. Focus on those qualities.
- Find an activity that you enjoy and do well — maybe a new hobby or sport — and make time for it.
- Join a support group for people with bipolar disorder.
- Educate yourself about bipolar disorder.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs.

When coping with bipolar disorder, remember to focus on taking care of yourself: Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep each night. You may be amazed at how much better you feel when you emphasize taking care of yourself.