
Bipolar Disorder Diagnostic Interview

Last updated October 2023

Introduction

The most challenging aspect of diagnosing bipolar disorder is establishing a history of a manic or hypomanic episode. Patients with bipolar disorder spend much more time in depressed episodes and may not clearly recall having had a manic episode. Furthermore, the symptoms of mania overlap with other syndromes, such as borderline personality disorder, psychosis, anxiety, and ADHD.

DSM-5 criteria

There are two common types of bipolar disorder:

- Bipolar disorder Type 1: A history of episodes of depression and mania
- Bipolar disorder Type 2: A history of episodes of depression and hypomania

Mania

One week of distinct elevated or irritable mood plus 3/7 DIGFAST symptoms:

- Distractibility
- Indiscretion
- Grandiosity
- Flight of ideas
- Activity excess
- Sleep not needed
- Talkativeness

Hypomania

Same as mania criteria except distinct mood need only last for **4 days** and the episode does not cause marked impairment in functioning.

Depression

Two weeks of depressed mood plus 5/8 SIGECAPS symptoms for 2 weeks. (See Diagnosing Depression fact sheet for more details)

Diagnostic Interviewing Tips

Quick screening questions for a history of mania

"Has there been a time of several days when your mood felt great and you slept only two or three hours a night, or even less, but still had a lot of energy?"

Sometimes people will say that they have "mood swings" and believe this means they have bipolar disorder. This may mean that they go from feeling depressed to feeling normal (which does not qualify as bipolar disorder). To clarify this issue, ask something like:

"When you felt better, did people say, 'you look like you're feeling pretty well' or did they say 'wow, you're acting sort of different or strange.'"

Follow-up questions when the screen is positive

If you believe that your patient's answers to your screening questions indicate a probable manic (or hypomanic) episode in the past, your next step is to ask about each of the DIGFAST symptoms, referring repeatedly to the most severe manic period they can recall.

Now I want to ask you some questions about things you were doing during that week last year when you felt manic.

Distractibility. *During that period, was it hard for you to concentrate on one thing at a time?*

Indiscretion (high risk behaviors). *As you look back over that period, did you recall doing anything that could have caused trouble for you or your family? Did you find yourself involved in doing things that you wouldn't ordinarily do? Things that you look back on now as showing poor judgment or being risky?*

Grandiosity. *During that period, did you have a sense that you were smarter or more attractive than others, or did you have the sense that you could accomplish a lot more, or had special powers or skills that others don't have? That you were much more capable and more confident, above what is normal for you at your baseline?*

Flight of ideas. *During that period, did you find that you had lots of ideas going through your mind? Where those good ideas going through your mind? Did you feel that your mind was accelerated, like it was in 5th gear and you couldn't slow it down?*

You may need to distinguish this from anxious thinking by asking, "You said you had a sense that your mind was going quickly, was it that you were worrying or ruminating over and over again?"

Activity excess

Did you have the sense that you wanted to keep moving or that you were physically uncomfortable if you were just sitting still? Did you sense that you were very fidgety?

Did you find yourself much more active than usual? If I had been with you, would I have found you to be much more active than is normal for you?

Sleep not needed

Did you find that you didn't need as much sleep as usual? Were you able to get by on only a couple of hours of sleep a night?

Talkativeness

Did you have the sense that it was hard to stop talking once you started talking? Or did you find yourself interrupting people?