

# Wellness at Work



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

We've been there. We can help.

## You can do it.

Depression and bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) can present many challenges. But there are things you can do to manage your symptoms and stay well at work.

## You are not alone.

Many people with depression and bipolar disorder cope with job-related issues. According to DBSA's recent constituency survey, the most common are:

My illness affected my ability to perform job duties	88%
I had to change jobs more often than other people	65%
I was passed up for a promotion	65%
I had to completely change my career	60%
I quit working outside the home	58%
I was given less responsibility at work	48%

## Never give up hope.

Work with your health care providers and DBSA support group to manage your symptoms and make your job or volunteer activities part of your wellness plan.

This brochure provides a very brief introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave Act and Social Security Disability Insurance. The information provided should not take the place of a consultation with the appropriate agency or professional. Decisions regarding leave, disability or other important employment issues should not be based solely on the information in this brochure.

## Be aware of your symptoms.

One of the first steps in staying healthy at work is figuring out what symptoms affect you and which ones give you the most trouble.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION	HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME AT WORK?		
	A LOT	A LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
Sadness, crying spells			
Major changes in appetite and sleep patterns			
Irritability, anger			
Worry, anxiety, sensitivity			
Pessimism, indifference, feeling like nothing will ever go right			
Loss of energy, constant exhaustion			
Unexplained aches and pains			
Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or hopelessness			
Not able to concentrate or make decisions			
Not able to enjoy things you once liked, not wanting to socialize			
Excessive alcohol or drug use			
Recurring thoughts of death or suicide			

**If you or someone you know has thoughts of death or suicide, contact a medical professional, clergy member, loved one, friend or crisis line such as 1-800-SUICIDE, or go immediately to the nearest emergency room.**

SYMPTOMS OF MANIA	HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME AT WORK?		
	A LOT	A LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
Increased physical and mental activity and energy			
Extreme optimism and self-confidence			
Grandiose thoughts, increased sense of self-importance			
Irritability			
Aggressive behavior			
Decreased need for sleep without feeling tired			
Racing speech, racing thoughts			
Impulsiveness, poor judgment			
Reckless behavior such as spending sprees, major business decisions, careless driving and sexual promiscuity			
In severe cases, delusions and hallucinations (thinking, seeing or hearing things that aren't true or don't exist)			

## Staying Healthy at Work

Good mental health at work comes with symptom management. Taking steps to reduce your symptoms and keep yourself well can have a positive effect on your work.

### Taking care of yourself

- **Take breaks**, even when you don't think you need them. Know what increases your stress level. Recognize when you are feeling more stress and need to step back from your work. You might want to take a short time out to meditate, do a relaxation exercise, listen to a tape or CD, or read a helpful brochure or book.

WHAT INCREASES MY STRESS LEVEL?

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WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I FEEL INCREASED STRESS?

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- **Get encouragement and perspective** by making a short phone call to a friend or family member.

WHO CAN I CALL WHEN  
I NEED PERSPECTIVE?

PHONE NUMBER

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- **Stick with your treatment while working.** It's important to take your medication(s) as prescribed, even at work. Keep your medication in a vitamin bottle or take it during your lunch hour if you don't want others to see it. Set a timer, alarm or reminder on your computer if you often forget to take medication.
- **Address side effects.** Talk to your doctor about changing your dosing time if your medication makes you feel drowsy or restless at work. Take medication with food if nausea is a problem. Keep water nearby if you get a dry mouth.
- **Know that you can be most productive with a stable mood.** Don't allow mania or hypomania to go untreated. As productive as you may feel at the time, you may be more likely to make mistakes.

- **Find a sense of purpose** or passion in your personal life. Know that there is more to your life than work. This may include

- Helping your local DBSA group
- Volunteering with a local charity
- Spending time with family and friends
- Going after other goals such as learning a new skill or writing your life story
- Planning events you can look forward to



- **Tell yourself you can feel better** when you are having a difficult day. Even if you don't feel better right away, know that you have the tools to work toward wellness.
- **Keep life simple.**
- **Get enough rest**, eat nutritious meals and do some type of physical exercise daily.
- **Get help before there is a crisis.** Make an appointment with your health care provider right away if you feel an episode coming on, so you can take steps to stabilize your mood.
- **Be prepared.** Sometimes an episode of depression or mania happens even when you are doing everything right – following your treatment, sleeping and eating enough, and getting support. If this happens, get the help you need.
- **Take time to recover** if you have had a manic or depressive episode. Allow yourself to take things slower.
- **Remember that you are not your symptoms, and you are not your illness.**

## Getting the most from your job

- **Look for opportunities to learn** at work.  
Knowledge and skills can always help you, even if you aren't able to use what you learn right away.
- **Use creative problem-solving skills** to manage your time and workload. Make to-do lists that are easy for you to use. Write things down if you have trouble remembering them.
- **See each challenge as a learning experience.**  
Even if the experience is difficult, ask yourself what you can learn from it.
- **Gain strength from your past successes.** Apply things that worked for you in past to new challenges you face. When you are praised at work, remember it.
- **Do your best**, regardless of how you feel.
- **Believe that you are worthwhile**, and you are doing good work. Give yourself credit for everything you do, including small things.
- **Direct your energy toward one project at a time**, and break large projects down into small, manageable steps.

### HOW HAVE I TAKEN CARE OF MYSELF AT WORK?

- Even when I feel angry or irritable, I don't act on those feelings.
- I get enough sleep, eat well and exercise.
- I follow my treatment plan.
- I talk about my job challenges with my support group.
- I find ways to manage stress such as
  - A short break
  - A walk around the workplace
  - Taking a deep breath
  - A short call to a support person
- I use a journal or DBSA Personal Calendar to track my moods.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT SKILLS AND TALENTS DO I HAVE?

- I think creatively at work.
- I can solve problems.
- I work hard and I care about my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Working with others

- **Address problems as they happen**, rather than building resentment. Discuss your needs with your supervisor using “I” statements, such as “I feel pressured when I get an important project at the last minute.”
- **Accept your own limitations** and try not to take on more work than you can handle.
- **Ask for help.** Take opportunities to learn from others and empower yourself.
- **Accept others and their limitations.** If you have trouble with a co-worker, focus on the problem, not the person.
- **Be ready to change.** Keep an open mind and accept constructive criticism.

WHAT HAVE I DONE WELL AT WORK?

- I got to work on time.
- I contributed to a project.
- I finished my to-do list.
- I was helpful to someone.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## Should I tell anyone about my illness?



It is your choice whether to talk about your illness at work and who to tell. Not everyone is educated about depression and bipolar disorder. You may choose not to tell anyone, or you may choose to tell others in order to educate them.

You may need to discuss your illness with your supervisor if you need special accommodations. These may include shorter days, special hours, more frequent breaks, time off, or changes in job responsibilities or work environment.

Discuss your needs with your supervisor. Bring some educational materials about your illness. You might want to bring a letter from your health care provider. Let your supervisor know what you need and why you need it. Point out positive things, such as how the accommodation will help you be more productive.

## Are there laws that protect me at work?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people from discrimination due to disability. It is a complicated set of laws that affects people in different ways. Research ADA laws carefully to find out if they apply to your situation before taking action. More ADA information is available by calling the U.S. Department of Justice ADA Information Line at 1-800-514-0301 or visiting [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov).

## Taking time off

While it's important to use your support network to help cope with job-related problems, it's just as important to take care of your health. Take advantage of paid sick leave or vacation time if your symptoms become severe. If you don't have enough leave time, you have some other options.

**Short- or long-term disability insurance** is offered by some employers. These policies allow employees to take time off with a percentage of their pay if they are ill or injured. Look through your employee manual or check with your Human Resources department to find out what your workplace offers. You may also be able to buy a policy on your own.

**The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** is a law that allows employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during a year if the employee or a family member becomes seriously ill. FMLA is a complex law; research it to see if you can benefit from it. For more information, call 1-866-487-9243/TTY 1-877-889-5627 or visit [www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla](http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla).

**Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** benefits are government benefits paid to people who can't work because of physical or mental disability. You can apply for SSDI at your local Social Security Administration office, by phone or online. Call 1-800-772-1213/TTY 1-800-325-0778 or visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) to learn more about SSDI.

## Activities during recovery

When you are recovering from an episode of mania or depression, you may need to spend some time with no demands on your time or energy. When you start to feel better, you may want something to occupy your time. Volunteering may be an option. Contact charity organizations in your area to find out what type of assistance they need. Helping your local DBSA group or forming a new group can also be rewarding.

As you recover, pace yourself to keep from becoming over-stressed. When you go back to work, you might want to work part-time until you are sure your

## Going back to work

If you have quit a job or been fired, or if you are unable to find a job, you are not alone. Getting back to work may take some time. It may be difficult to find a job right away if you haven't been working for awhile. Having ideas about your goals and skills can help. Ask a talk therapist or employment counselor for help identifying your skills and planning your search. Look for community-based services with sliding fee scales if necessary.

Make a list of your skills and the qualities that make you a good employee. Are you creative? Hard working? Friendly? Considerate? What life experiences have you had, and what have you learned from them? All these things are assets you can bring to a job.

Then list the things you want from a job. Do you like to work alone or with a large group? Do you prefer a quiet environment or one with a lot of activity? Do you prefer simple work or solving complicated problems? Do you like to be given directions or do you prefer to work on your own? What time of day do you prefer to work? How far are you able to commute?

For help writing your resume and cover letter, look for helpful articles in the business section of your newspaper and on job search websites. You can also check your local library or bookstore for books on finding a job. Ask people you know, including those in your DBSA group, if they know of any available jobs. Don't give up hope, even if it takes some time to find a job. Don't let past setbacks or bad job experiences keep you from pursuing your goals.



## How can DBSA support groups help?

No one with depression or bipolar disorder needs to feel alone or ashamed. DBSA support groups provide a safe, caring place to talk about your work and other challenges. Contact DBSA at 1-800-826-3632 or visit [www.DBSAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAlliance.org) to locate the DBSA chapter or support group nearest you. If there is no group in your area, DBSA can help you start one.

When combined with treatment, DBSA support groups:

- Can help you stick with your treatment plan and avoid hospitalization.
- Provide a place for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery.
- Help you understand that depression or bipolar disorder does not define who you are.
- Give you the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of those who have “been there.”

## Symptom Management Checklist

WHAT ARE MY SYMPTOMS?	WHAT CAN I DO?
Can't concentrate, trouble finishing jobs	
Get irritable, lose my temper, trouble interacting with others	
Get worried, panic, trouble handling workload	
Body aches and pains	
No energy, exhausted all the time	
Can't sleep at night – tired at work	
Can't wake up in the morning, late for work	

WHAT ARE MY SYMPTOMS?	WHAT CAN I DO?
Change in appetite	
Feel miserable, worthless or tearful	
Can't get motivated or care about my work	
Believe nothing ever goes right or ever will	
Medication side effects	
Drinking or using substances	
Talking too fast or too loud	
Racing or disorganized thoughts	
Working faster than everyone else	
Impulsiveness, poor judgment	

## Note to Supervisors:

### Help your employees recognize depression or bipolar disorder and find treatment by

- Educating yourself about depression and bipolar disorder, and knowing the signs that an employee may need help.
- Educating your staff about symptoms and treatments.
- Being available to employees as a confidential resource.
- Refusing to tolerate stigma or name-calling.
- Supporting employees who need special accommodations.

## Resources

The following organizations and others listed in this brochure may provide additional help with job-related issues. DBSA assumes no responsibility for the content or accuracy of the material they provide.

### **Bazon Center for Mental Health Law**

(Provides information but cannot give individual legal advice.)  
[www.bazon.org](http://www.bazon.org)

### **Disability & Business Technical Assistance Center**

1-800-949-4232 (V/TTY) • [www.adata.org](http://www.adata.org)

### **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**

1-800-669-4000/1-800-669-6820 (TTY) • [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

### **Job Accommodation Network**

1-800-526-7234 (V/TTY) • [www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)

### **National Association of Protection and Advocacy**

1-202-408-9514 • [www.napas.org](http://www.napas.org)

### **National Center on Workplace and Disability**

1-888-886-9898 (V/TTY) • [www.onestops.info](http://www.onestops.info)

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

1-800-789-2647/1-866-889-2647 (TTY)  
[www.mentalhealth.org](http://www.mentalhealth.org)

**Please help us continue our education efforts.**

We hope you found the information in this brochure useful. Your gift will help us continue to distribute this information and help people stay well at work. Please fill in and mail the donation form below, call 1-800-826-3632 or visit [www.DBSAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAlliance.org) for more information.

**Yes**, I want to make a difference. Enclosed is my gift of:

\$100     \$50     \$20     Other \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

FAX \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Check (payable to DBSA)     Money order  
 VISA     MasterCard     Discover Card

ACCOUNT \_\_\_\_\_ EXP. DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CREDIT CARD \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE (REQUIRED) \_\_\_\_\_

- I wish my gift to remain anonymous.
- Please send me \_\_\_\_ donation envelopes to share.
- I'd like details on including DBSA in my will.
- I have enclosed my company's matching gift form.
- I'd like to receive more information about mood disorders.
- Please send all correspondence in a confidential envelope.

*If you would like to make your gift a Memorial or Honorary tribute, please complete the following:*

In Memory of/In Honor of (circle one):

PRINT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Please send an acknowledgment to:

RECIPIENT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Please send this form with payment to: **DBSA**  
**730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501, Chicago, IL 60610-7224 USA**

**Questions?** Call 1-800-826-3632 or 1-312-642-0049.

**Credit card payments** (Visa, MasterCard or Discover) may be faxed to 1-312-642-7243.

**Secure online donations** can also be made at [www.DBSAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAlliance.org).

DBSA is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) Illinois corporation. All donations and bequests are tax deductible based on federal and state IRS regulations. For more information, please consult your tax advisor.

**Thank you for your gift!**



We've been there.  
We can help.

Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

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**The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)** is the leading patient-directed national organization focusing on the most prevalent mental illnesses. The organization fosters an environment of understanding about the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date, scientifically-based tools and information written in language the general public can understand. DBSA supports research to promote more timely diagnosis, develop more effective and tolerable treatments and discover a cure. The organization works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably.

Assisted by a Scientific Advisory Board comprised of the leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 1,000 peer-run support groups across the country. Nearly two million people request and receive information and assistance each year. DBSA's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

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**Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501  
Chicago, Illinois 60610-7224 USA  
Phone: 1-800-826-3632 or 1-312-642-0049  
Fax: 1-312-642-7243  
Website: [www.DBSAAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org)

*Visit our updated, interactive website for important information, breaking news, chapter connections, advocacy help and much more.*

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This brochure was reviewed by DBSA Scientific Advisory Board member J. Raymond DePaulo, Jr., M.D., Henry Phipps Professor and Director of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, and by Sekhar S. of DBSA New Jersey.

DBSA does not endorse or recommend any specific treatment or medication for mood disorders. For advice about specific treatments or medications, individuals should consult their health care providers.