

Define What Recovery Means to You When You Have Bipolar Disorder

People often have a different idea of what the term “recovery” means to them in relation to bipolar disorder. Some think of it as no longer needing to take medication or see a doctor or therapist. Others may think of it as regaining control of their lives with medication, therapy, lifestyle changes, and/or other approaches. Some people don’t view bipolar as an illness (they may even view it as a gift) and seek lifestyle changes as a way to accommodate their extreme highs and lows.

In rare cases, recovery means returning to life as it was before bipolar disorder entered the picture. Recovery typically requires at least a few adjustments to accommodate bipolar disorder as a part of one’s new reality. Like all life-changing events, a major mood episode changes you and your situation and may call for some adjustments.

What’s important is that you define what recovery means to *you*. Take some time to jot down notes about what recovery looks like to you. As you “reinvent” yourself, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- * Don’t try to live up to someone else’s expectations or what you think those expectations are. There is no such thing as the perfect parent, son, daughter, spouse, student, employee, or person in any other role. Each individual is unique, and you have the power to define who you are and what you do. You write your own story — no one else can do that for you.
- * Feel free to shift or adjust your expectations, but avoid talk of lowering them. Your language about yourself affects how you feel, and more neutral rather than critical self-talk can make a big difference. Having bipolar disorder doesn’t mean giving up dreams. You may simply need to take a detour or change the pace at which you travel toward your goal. And if goals do change, try to consider the process as growth and change rather than surrender or failure.
- * Be prepared for your priorities to shift. For example, status and possessions may become less important to you as your focus shifts to maintaining your health and personal relationships. Your career goals also may change. These may represent very positive changes.

Realize that your definition of recovery can change. After a major mood episode, recovery may mean keeping your symptoms in check. After you’ve accomplished that, recovery may mean returning to work part time. Take it one step at a time.