

Bipolar Disorder and Aging

Bipolar disorder is a lifelong illness. If you're diagnosed as a younger adult, the disorder will continue into your senior years. However, some older adults find it easier to manage their symptoms as they age, thanks to their experience with the condition. Over the years, they've learned how to adjust their lifestyle to maintain emotional health and have accumulated valuable tips and strategies through therapy.

Challenges in Older Adults

Unfortunately, for some older adults, bipolar disorder may worsen with age. Your senior years often bring significant life transitions, such as retirement, changes in family dynamics, loss of loved ones, medical diagnoses, or moving to a more accessible home. While not all changes are negative, any major life shift can take an emotional toll. As you adapt to a new phase of life, mental health symptoms may re-emerge.

Risks of Untreated Bipolar Disorder

Untreated or unmanaged bipolar disorder can also present increased risks as you age. Reckless and impulsive decision-making, a hallmark of manic episodes, can lead to serious consequences, especially if you have limited mobility or other medical issues. For instance, a senior in a manic episode might try to drive despite no longer being able to do so safely.

Late-Onset Bipolar Disorder

In some cases, bipolar disorder may appear for the first time in older adulthood. Known as late-onset bipolar disorder, this accounts for about 10% of cases in individuals over the age of 50. However, bipolar disorder can be underdiagnosed in seniors because mental health symptoms are often overlooked in this age group.