

Bipolar disorder and diabetes: What is the link?

People with bipolar disorder develop more medical illnesses than individuals without bipolar disorder. One medical illness that occurs more frequently in people with bipolar disorder is type 2 diabetes.¹

How are bipolar disorder and diabetes linked?

Some reasons for the links between bipolar disorder and the risk for type 2 diabetes are clearer than others. Clear reasons for the link include:

- **Poor diet**—Because of the easy access and low cost of fast food, many persons have unhealthy diets. An unhealthy diet is especially risky for people with bipolar disorder because they are at higher risk for developing metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes. Some foods that are unhealthy when eaten in large amounts are high saturated fat foods (burgers and fries), high sugar foods (cookies and cakes) and high carbohydrate foods (white bread).²
- **Too little exercise**—For people with bipolar disorder, too little exercise is dangerous. It can lead to obesity, which can lead to metabolic syndrome (high blood pressure, high LDL (bad) cholesterol, low HDL (good) cholesterol, large waist size and obesity).³
- **Smoking**—Smoking cigarettes is linked to the development and worsening of type 2 diabetes.⁴
- **Medicines**—Some medicines used to treat bipolar disorder are linked to the development of metabolic syndrome. This may be due to the medicine’s side effects (increased appetite and a calming effect that may result in reduced physical exercise).⁵

Addressing the link

There are many steps you can take to control risk factors for or complications of type 2 diabetes. One step that is not advisable is stopping prescribed medicines. Stopping medicines (either for bipolar disorder or type 2 diabetes) without a doctor’s okay may result in problems managing both illnesses. Healthy steps you can take include:

- **Maintaining a healthy diet.**
 - Consume less fat. Drink low-fat or skim milk instead of whole milk. Use small amounts of butter or margarine. Eat light meat chicken or turkey. Cut down on cheese and eggs.

¹ <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/diabetes-bipolar-disorder-takes-its-toll>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6480108/>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6480108/>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/diabetes.html>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6718373/>

- Eat more:
 - Whole grains—Foods with whole grains include whole wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal and puff-grain cereals.
 - Fruits and veggies—Eating fruits and veggies makes you feel fuller longer. Fruits and veggies contain many things that are good for you.
- Eat fish. Fish is good for your heart and mind.
- Use olive, canola or sesame oil instead of corn or vegetable oil.
- Cut down on sugar. Eat half of your dessert. Drink low-calorie drinks or water.
- **Getting enough exercise.** Talk with your doctor before starting to exercise. Always start out slow and build up to prevent injuries. For example, going from a five-minute slow walk two times per week to a 30-minute brisk walk three times per week. Also, keep a realistic outlook about your progress.
- **Stopping or reducing smoking.** Discuss options with your doctor. Your doctor can help you choose the method that is best for you.
- **Monitor and manage your health.**
 - Get a checkup at least every year and more often if you have signs of metabolic syndrome. A complete health checkup should include weight, waist size, blood pressure, fasting glucose level and fasting fat (cholesterol and triglyceride) levels.
 - Give your written okay for your psychiatrist and primary care doctor to talk with each other about your health care. This will help them make sure you get the best care possible.

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