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Bipolar Disorder

FOR DUMMIES[®]

Candida Fink, MD

Psychiatrist specializing in bipolar disorder

Joe Kraynak

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Joe Kraynak, MA (Speedway, Indiana) is a freelance author who has written and co-authored dozens of books on topics ranging from slam poetry to personal computers. Joe received his degree in bipolar disorder from the College of Hard Knocks. On December 10, 1999, Joe's wife, Cecie, a Spanish teacher at the time, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Since that day, they have bounced around to a half dozen doctors and even more therapists, broke in a few young marriage counselors, survived several changes in health insurance coverage, attended dozens of support group meetings, and endured the career changes and financial hardships that commonly accompany bipolar disorder. In this book, Joe offers his experience and insight from life in the trenches.

Dedications

From Candida: To my Mom, who loved and taught with compassion and selflessness that profoundly changed all who knew her. She was my rock, and she's deeply missed.

From Joe: To my wife, Cecie, whose zest for life and genuine interest in the lives of others engage and inspire everyone she touches.

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Introduction

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Imagine yourself cruising down the highway at a comfortable speed of 65 miles per hour when your cruise control goes berserk. The speedometer climbs to 75 and then 85 . . . you hit the button to cancel . . . tap the brakes . . . nothing slows you down . . . 95 . . . your car is shaking and weaving . . . 100 . . . people are honking . . . 105 . . . police are chasing you . . . 110 . . . your spouse is yelling at you to SLOW DOWN . . . 115 . . . 120 . . .

Or imagine the opposite: You're driving through town, 30 mile-per-hour speed limit, nobody in front of you, and your car can only go 3 miles per hour. You're practically pushing the accelerator through the floor, but you can only get it up to 5 miles per hour . . . downhill! Your neighbors are honking, passing you on the right — on bicycles — giving you dirty looks and other gestures of discontent.

When you have bipolar disorder, your brain's accelerator is stuck. At full speed, it launches you into a manic episode. In slow gear, it grinds you down into a deep depression. If this were your heart, somebody would call the ambulance, doctors and nurses would flock to your bedside, loved ones would fly in from other states, and you'd get flowers and fruit baskets. But when your brain is stuck in park or overdrive, people just think you're lazy, you've snapped, or you're too weak to deal with life. Instead of flowers and fruit baskets, you get a pink slip and divorce papers.

The good news is that the mind mechanics — psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists — have toolboxes packed with medications and therapies that can repair your brain's accelerator. In this book, we reveal those tools, along with strategies and techniques that you can use to achieve and maintain mood stability and to help yourself feel a whole lot better.

About This Book

This book is more than a repair manual for the bipolar brain. Sure, we discuss diagnoses and treatments, available medications and therapies, and the lifestyle changes that can help you cope. But we also go beyond that to reveal some of the causes and consequences of bipolar disorder, let you in on some crisis-survival strategies, and describe ways that friends and family members can support loved ones who have bipolar disorder. Our goal is to help you develop a deeper understanding of bipolar disorder and its symptoms and empower you to take more control of your treatment, eliminate your symptoms, and regain your ability to function.

In the quest to make you or your loved one feel better and maintain stable moods, we focus on the three Cs of bipolar disorder:

- ✔ **Continuity of treatment:** In this era of specialization and managed healthcare, patients often get shuttled from one doctor or therapist to another, and each professional may have a unique approach. Any drastic changes to medication or therapy can upset the balance, so this book encourages you to develop a treatment plan that all your caregivers follow and that remains with you when you change doctors or therapists.
- ✔ **Comprehensive treatment:** The most effective treatment plan calls for a three-pronged attack of medication, therapy, and lifestyle change. In this book, we explain why your treatment plan should address all three factors, and we reveal the most effective medications, therapies, peer support options, and lifestyle changes currently available.
- ✔ **Coordinated treatment:** Communication is the key to coordinated treatment, and communication breakdowns are at the root of most failed attempts. To ensure success, communicate openly and honestly with your doctor, therapist, and loved ones and encourage them to communicate with one another. Throughout the book, we reveal techniques to improve communication among all members of your treatment team.

Of course, this book is no replacement for professional psychiatric care. (We kicked around the idea of bundling the book with a blank prescription pad, but our publisher nixed the idea.) Even so, *Bipolar Disorder For Dummies* can help you gain a better understanding of your treatment choices so you can build a more cooperative and productive relationship with your healthcare providers.

Conventions Used in This Book

We don't like to think of *our* book as *conventional*, but we do have some standard ways of presenting material. For example:

- ✔ Whenever we introduce a new, somewhat technical term, such as *expressed emotion*, we display it in italics. We enclose a commonly used term that's not necessarily a technical term "in quotes." If you're reading the book aloud or your lips are moving, make the finger gesture for quotes to get the full effect.
- ✔ Web and e-mail addresses appear in `monofont` to help them stand out on the page for easy access.
- ✔ In almost every chapter, we include stories about people who have bipolar disorder and their loved ones. These stories aren't necessarily about real people — they represent composites of real people we've met and worked with over the years.

What You're Not to Read

You can skip any text we mark with a Technical Stuff icon because the only people who really care about this stuff are doctors and the lawyers who want to sue the doctors. And sidebars are just what the name implies. They give you somewhere to hang out when you don't have somewhere else to go or something better to do. Most of our sidebars tell stories that are *sort of* based on reality, and they're about the most entertaining parts of the book, so be selective in what you skip. **Note:** However, we don't recommend that you skip the sidebars with Bipolar Bio icons next to them.

Foolish Assumptions

When you (or loved ones) are diagnosed with bipolar disorder, you automatically become a rank beginner. You never needed the information before and probably had little interest in the topic. Now you need to get up to speed in a hurry. With that in mind, the biggest foolish assumption we make in this book is that you know very little about bipolar disorder. If you've been to a doctor or therapist and have already received a diagnosis, however, you know at least a little. And if you got burned by a misdiagnosis or the wrong approach, you know that you don't want it to happen again. But no matter what level you're at, this book can help.

We also assume that you or someone you know has bipolar disorder or that you're at least somewhat curious about it. The more bipolar disorder affects you, your family, or someone you know, the more this book helps.

Finally, we assume that you have a sense of humor. According to Jean de la Bruyère, "Life is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think." We're thinking people. We laugh through our tears rather than wallow in our misery, although we, too, have shed our fair share of tears. We have loved ones with bipolar disorder, and we know it's painful for everyone involved, but we've found that most people with bipolar disorder and their loved ones have a healthy sense of humor. Maybe it's because they're smarter than the average Joe, or perhaps they've just had to deal with so much bad stuff in their lives that they need a moment to laugh.

In this book, we wanted to strip away all the politically correct niceties and namby-pamby psychospeak. We chose not to sweeten the bitter facts with butter-cream frosting, and we don't hesitate to laugh at the absurdities of living with bipolar disorder. We certainly hope that you won't find any of this more than mildly offensive and that you'll indulge in a few laughs yourself.

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