

CHARTING SYMPTOMS

May Help Prevent a Depressive/Manic-Depressive Episode

Charting eliminates the guessing game and enables us and our families to recognize when an acute episode may be on its way. This knowledge is essential since the goal is to intervene and help prevent these episodes.

The more we are educated about our illness and the more tools we have available to use as preventative and coping strategies, the more power we must prevent recurrences.

We are all too familiar with the misery and misfortune that often accompanies an acute episode. These experiences wear us down.

"Predicting occasional serious relapses on the way to remission is important in minimizing serious and potentially lethal discouragement in a high-risk transitional period" is quoted in Manic-Depressive Illness by Goodwin and Jamison. This basic method of charting can empower you with a valuable yet simple preventative tool.

If your diagnosis is unipolar or depression, you will need one chart per month. If your diagnosis is bipolar or manic depression, you can use two charts per month - one chart for warning signs of depressive episodes and a second chart for manic or hypo-manic episodes.

To use the chart correctly, follow these easy instructions. Be sure to make photocopies of the chart and always keep a blank one for future copies.

1. Fill in the information at the bottom of the chart. List your medications and their side effects and your early warning signs.

2. If you have seasonal mood swings (SAD), perhaps you may want to make a note of the weather on a particular day.

Studies show there seems to be a consistency to the early warning signs listed below but symptoms vary with each person.

Some early warning signs for an **acute mania episode**:

- Decrease in sleep, unable to fall asleep, too many thoughts keeping you awake
- Rapidly moving or racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating
- Rapid or pressured speech, jumping from one idea to another, incessant use of the telephone
- Having excessive energy, starting many projects, feeling hyper, feeling overly elated
- Increased sex drive
- Feeling irritable, easily angered, usually combative
- Thinking about or using drugs or alcohol
- Inflated sense of self, the Midas touch, feeling infallible, grandiose ideas
- Provocative, inappropriate, or personally compromising behavior, feeling a need to live on the edge
- Thinking about or spending money recklessly, gambling, excessive spending sprees

Some early warning signs for an **acute depressive episode**:

- Increase in sleep, isolating yourself
- Thoughts of feeling heavy, moving in slow motion





- 🧠 Decreased energy, feeling slowed down, things just take too much effort
- 🧠 Decrease in sex drive (some SSRI drugs can do this)
- 🧠 Feeling sad, blue, down in the dumps
- 🧠 Feeling very sensitive and fragile, crying for no apparent reason, feeling is easily hurt
- 🧠 Feeling hopeless; life is too hard and not worth living
- 🧠 Lack of enthusiasm for activities that used to be enjoyable, unable to go to work, life seems bland
- 🧠 Feeling worthless -- considering suicide

For each day of the month, rate the degree you are experiencing each symptom using these letters:

0 = no S = small M = medium L = large

If two or more warning signs are rated 'M' or 'L' for three consecutive days, it is suggested you call your doctor. For some, one sleepless night is enough to signal the rapid onset of a manic episode. For this reason, it is suggested that you work as a team with your doctor and perhaps a trusted family member or friend to determine what your early warning signs are and at what point the intervention should occur.

Many participants found that it was important to chart every day, even when they were feeling well. This helps give a baseline reading when things go awry. The time to chart should be in the evening before retiring and it requires ten minutes or less.

Many psychiatrists recommend charting as an effective tool to manage these illnesses.

The important thing is to just do it.

"Those who live with a mood disorder can not only cope but succeed in spite of their illness."





Since each month begins on a different day, fill in the day of the month in the top left corner.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT

MEDICATIONS

Side effects:

My early warning signs:

