Borderline Personality Disorder

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a serious mental illness. Someone with BPD may have a pattern of extreme mood swings, unstable behavior, and feel uncertain about who they are. They are often impulsive and have trouble in relationships. They may also have periods of anger, depression, and anxiety that may last from a few hours to days.

Some people with BPD also have other mental health problems, such as mood, anxiety, and eating disorders. They are more at risk for substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide.

Signs of BPD

- Frantic efforts to avoid being abandoned, whether real or imagined
- Pattern of intense and unstable relationships with family, friends, and loved ones that often swing from feeling very close to strong dislike
- Distorted and changing self-image
- Impulsive and dangerous behaviors, such as spending sprees, unsafe sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, and binge eating
- Suicidal behaviors or self-harm, such as cutting
- Intense mood swings lasting a few hours to a few days
- Feelings of emptiness
- Intense anger or problems controlling anger
- Paranoid thoughts
- Feelings of seeing oneself from outside the body, or losing touch with reality

Talk to your doctor or a mental health provider if you have these signs.

Having these signs does not always mean that you have BPD. Some of these may be seen with other health problems, including other mental illness. See your doctor or mental health professional for treatment.

Triggers of BPD

Signs of BPD may be triggered by what seem to be normal, ordinary events. For example, people with BPD may feel angry and upset over being away from people they are close to because of a vacation, business trip, or sudden change of plans.
Risk factors for BPD

The causes of BPD are not yet known, but research shows that causes may involve genetic, brain, environmental, and social factors.

- **Genetics**
  BPD is more likely to occur if you have a close family member with the disorder, such as your father, mother, brother, or sister.

- **Brain Factors**
  Studies show that some people with BPD have changes in their brain’s structure and how it works, especially in the areas that control impulses and emotions.

- **Environmental and Social Factors**
  Many people with BPD report having traumatic life events, such as abuse or being abandoned as a child. Others may have been exposed to unstable relationships and fighting.

Treatment

- **Psychotherapy**
  Psychotherapy, or talk therapy, is the main treatment for people with BPD. Individual and group counseling may be helpful. A type of psychotherapy, called Dialectical Behavioral Therapy or DBT, is often used to treat BPD. It involves learning new skills to manage life's challenges.

- **Medicine**
  In some cases, a medicine may be recommended to treat mood swings, depression, or other disorders that may occur with BPD.

Taking care of yourself, such as getting enough sleep, proper nutrition, and being active, can help keep you healthy and lessen stress. Short-term hospital stays may be needed in some cases.

How can I help myself if I have BPD?

- Talk to your doctor about treatment options and follow through with your treatment.
- Try to maintain a stable schedule of meals and sleep times.
- Engage in mild activity or exercise to help reduce stress.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small ones and do what you can.
- Try to spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or family member.
- Tell others about events or situations that may trigger your signs.
- Expect your signs to improve slowly over time and be patient with yourself.
- Seek situations, places, and people you find comforting.
- Continue to educate yourself about this disorder.
- Don’t drink alcohol or use illicit drugs. They will likely make things worse.
How can I help a friend or relative who has BPD?

The first and most important thing to help is to get the right diagnosis and treatment. You may need to make an appointment and go with your friend or relative to see the doctor. Encourage him or her to stay in treatment or to seek different treatment if he or she is not getting better.

To help a friend or relative you can:

• Offer emotional support, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
• Learn about mental disorders, including BPD, so you can understand what your friend or relative is going through.
• Seek counseling from your own therapist about helping a loved one with BPD. It should not be the same therapist that your loved one with BPD is seeing.
• Never ignore comments your loved one makes about harming himself or herself. Report the comments to the person’s therapist or doctor. In urgent or life-threatening situations, you may need to call the police or dial 911.

For more information

National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio (NAMI)
1225 Dublin Rd., Suite 125
Columbus, OH 43215
Phone: 614-224-2700
Toll Free: 800-686-2646
www.namiohio.org

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.