

Bipolar Disorder: A Guide for Department of Defense Line Leaders



This tool is intended to help you to identify and respond to your service members who may be experiencing symptoms of bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is marked by fluctuations in mood, thought, behavior, and social functioning.¹ There are different types of bipolar disorder which vary based on severity and duration of symptoms.²

What are the signs and symptoms of bipolar disorder?



Bipolar disorder may include symptoms of either mania, depression, or a combination that can last several days or weeks.²

Symptoms of Mania²

- Inflated self-esteem
- Decreased need for sleep
- More talkative than usual or pressure to keep talking
- Flight of ideas or racing thoughts
- Distractibility
- Increase in goal-directed activities (socially, work-related, or sexually) or agitation
- Engaging in risky activities, such as reckless spending or sexual indiscretions

Symptoms of Depression²

- Feeling worthless or inappropriate guilt
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation
- Fatigue
- Decreased ability to concentrate or indecisiveness
- Significant weight loss or increased appetite
- Decreased interest or pleasure in all or nearly all activities
- Recurrent thoughts of death

When should you seek help?



If your service member starts experiencing any of these symptoms, they may be exhibiting early signs of a mental health condition such as bipolar disorder. You can help your service member by encouraging them to seek care so they can receive proper treatment and support. **Call or text 988 the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline if they begin to experience thoughts of death or suicide.**

If you are a military line leader and are concerned by a service member's behavior, you can speak to your commanding officer to request a command-directed mental health evaluation. If you are a commander, you should take actions in accordance with DODI 6490.04.³

- If symptoms are severe, while maintaining service member safety, the commander refers them for an emergency command-directed mental health evaluation in accordance with DODI 6490.04, and ensures they arrive safely for the evaluation.³
- If there are no immediate safety concerns, follow DODI 6490.04 for your commander to refer your service member for a non-emergency command-directed mental health evaluation expert assessment, and to obtain recommendations related to suitability for continued military service.³

Relevant Policies

- [DODI 6490.04 Mental Health Evaluations of Members of the Military Services](#) outlines the responsibilities and procedures for commanders who refer service members for mental health evaluations.³
- [DODI 6490.05 Maintenance of Psychological Health in Military Operations](#) outlines responsibilities for combat and operational stress control programs within the Military Departments, Combatant Commands, and joint service.⁴
- [DOD 6000.14 DoD Patient Bill of Rights and Responsibilities in the Military Health System \(MHS\)](#) outlines patient rights and responsibilities.⁵
- [DODD 6130.03, Vol. 2 Medical Standards for Military Service: Retention](#) establishes medical retention standards.⁶

Resources



Military OneSource provides 24/7 support and information on housing, financial, legal, medical, and psychological services.

- State-side: 800-342-9647
- Overseas: 800-342-9647
- Collect: 484-530-5908

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil>



988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and the associated **Military/Veterans Crisis Line** provide free and confidential support for individuals in crisis. If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, call or text 988 or <https://988lifeline.org>; you can also press 1 or text 838255 to chat live with a counselor focused on military and veteran callers (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>).



inTransition offers specialized coaching and assistance for active duty service members, National Guard members, reservists, veterans, and retirees to help callers with their mental health care as they transition between systems of care.

- State-side: 800-424-7877
- Overseas: 800-748-81111 (in Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, and South Korea only)

<https://www.health.mil/inTransition>

References

- 1 Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense. (2023). *VA/DOD clinical practice guideline for the management of bipolar disorder*. (Version 4.0). <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/MH>
- 2 American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- 3 Department of Defense. (2020, April 22). *Mental health evaluations of members of the military service* (DOD Instruction 6490.04). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/649004p.pdf>
- 4 Department of Defense. (2020, May 29). *Maintenance of psychological health in military operations* (DOD Instruction 6490.05). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/649005p.pdf>
- 5 Department of Defense. (2020, April 3). *DOD Patient bill of rights and responsibilities in the Military Health System (MHS)* (DOD Instruction 6000.14). <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/600014p.pdf?ver=2020-04-03-132320-747>
- 6 Department of Defense. (2022, Volume 2). *Medical standards for military service: Retention* (DOD Instruction 6130.03). https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/613003_vol02.PDF?ver=vx1spUpNVLcc-0-rov00Sg%3d%3d



Note: This content is derived from the 2023 VA/DOD clinical practice guideline for management of bipolar disorder.



Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense health care providers who use this information are responsible for considering all applicable regulations and policies throughout the course of care and patient education. Created October 2023 by the Psychological Health Center of Excellence.