

# BeyondBipolar Newsletter

Clarity and hope  
for those seeking  
mental wellness

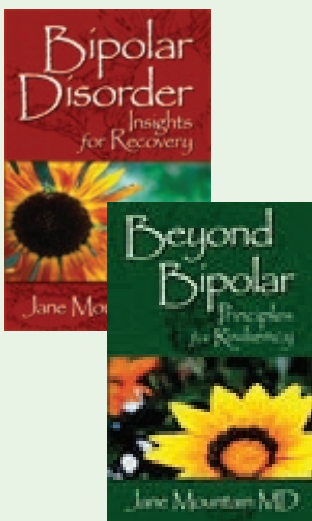
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**W**elcome to *BeyondBipolar*, a Newsletter focused on mental wellness for those who experience bipolar personally and in their families.

### **Medications: The Bain or Boon of Our Existence?**

NO MATTER WHAT we may think of taking medications, they are still highly effective in treating bipolar disorder. Not knowing the peculiarities of psychiatric medications can make it difficult to take medications. We sometimes miss the overall plan of attack when we're entangled in multiple trials of medications. This month's e-Newsletter lets us in on a few family secrets about psych meds. *(Article continues on p. 2)*

### **Do You Need A Speaker?**

*Dr. Mountain packs a punch with her keynotes, seminars and trainings. While she works out of Denver, she would love to travel to your region or city. Check out her website, [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com), on the "keynote speaker" page for topics that will bring hope and clarity to your audiences about bipolar disorder and other mental health topics.*

# Meeting the Family of Medications

**M**EDICATIONS ARE A CHALLENGE for nearly all who have bipolar disorder. Whether you are new to bipolar disorder or an old pro, you may sometimes wonder whether you want medications to become your lifetime pals. Often family members, friends or employers weigh in for or against. Some want you to feel better but don't appreciate that *getting* better is only the first challenge of bipolar disorder. *Staying* better is a process that nearly always requires you make medications your friends.

Psych meds are a lot like a large extended family that you are marrying into. You will want to get to know them one or two at a time rather than attending the family reunion and meeting hundreds of cousins at once. You may warm up to part of the family right away, but there may be cousins whom you consider to be black sheep.

If you've ever met the family all at once you may find it impossible to keep in your head who's who. The same is true with the large family of medications that are prescribed for psychiatric and other diagnoses. The

doctors, nurse practitioners and physicians assistants who prescribe medicine keep track of medicines by thinking about classes of medications—just as you might keep track of the cousins by remembering which uncle or aunt they belong to.

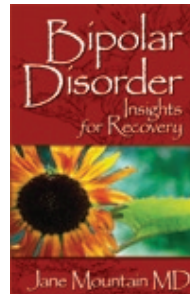
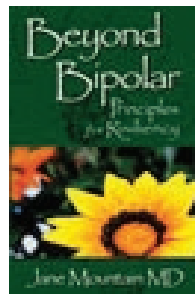
For instance, there are several classes of medications that are used primarily for high blood pressure. Each class is a part of the family of medicines for high blood pressure, but each part of the family or class works in a different way.

## ***Patience With the Cousins***

One major way in which most medications differ from psychiatric medications that non-psychiatric medication in a class or family will work pretty much the same for anyone with the condition being treated. For example, there is a class called ACE inhibitors that is used to treat high blood pressure. If your doctor decides that an ACE inhibitor is the class of medication to treat your high blood pressure, it doesn't matter which member of the ACE inhibitor family is chosen. They normally work about the same for each patient. These cousins are agreeable with everyone.

Perhaps with psych meds our brains are a bit pickier. A medication can be chosen from a class or family, but it might not work as well for one person as for the next. So there are many cousins, children of the same aunt and uncle, but they don't perform the same at all.

Dr. Mountain's new book, *Beyond Bipolar: Principles for Resiliency*, will be released soon. It will bring you street knowledge, and will help you to go *beyond bipolar* to mental wellness.



And don't forget that Dr. Mountain's first book, *Bipolar Disorder: Insights for Recovery*, can be purchased from Dr. Mountain's website, [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com), or from Amazon.com.

Medications within a class or family will work differently in different people. These cousins don't agree with everyone.

So do doctors still think of classes of medications when prescribing psych meds? Yes, they do! Does it matter which medication within a class is chosen for an individual? Yes, it does! The challenge is that, at this time in our medical knowledge, it is impossible to tell right off the bat which medication will work for whom.

Perhaps this sounds familiar to you. Have you tried one medicine to find that it doesn't work well for you, requiring a switch to a different medicine in the same class or family? The medicines are cousins but they don't look alike. This necessitates patience and some trial and error in finding the medication that will work for *you*.

Once the medication that works for you is found—you've hit pay dirt and are well on your way to mental wellness. Eureka! Oh, would that it were that simple! Usually it takes multiple trials of medications. Some of us give up too soon and lose the opportunity of finding the medication or combination of medications that will work the best. No pay dirt! No Eureka! More pain, more depression, more mania or hypomania, and more parts of our lives to put back together. We've been through this Humpty-Dumpty thing too many times to give up.

Even when it's hard and takes a long time, persistence can pay off with an excellent chance of achieving mental wellness. Work with your prescriber and give treatment a chance to work for you. Psychiatric disorders are more successfully treated than heart and lung diseases and most forms of cancer.

### **Longer to Work**

Another important key to recognize about psych meds is that most of them take longer

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## **Seminars by Jane Mountain, MD!**

### **Saturday, February 17:**

*Bipolar Disorder: Insights for Recovery.*

10:00 AM to Noon

*Bipolar Disorder: Treatment for Recovery.*

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

### **Saturday, March 3:**

*Beyond Bipolar: Principles for Resiliency.*

10:00 AM to Noon

*Bipolar Begone!: Skills for Recovery.*

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

All four seminars will be held at Messiah Community Church, 1750 Colorado Blvd, located across the street from the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Parking and entrance are to the east of the church off of 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Register now by calling 303.329.3364 or at [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com).**

Attend all four for \$100. Full day (two seminars) \$50.00. Any individual seminar \$25.00.

To learn more about Dr. Mountain's upcoming seminars and other speaking engagements, navigate to [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com), then click on the Schedule page in the sidebar.

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to work than do other classes of medications. You take something for high blood pressure or a common infection and the goal is usually accomplished in a few days to a couple of weeks.

The cousins in the psych med branch of the family don't work that way. (That dog don't hunt!) Psych meds almost always take longer to work than the medications most of us are

familiar with. Not understanding the delay between starting a medication and its taking effect can lead to stopping the medication before it has had a chance to work. (That dog don't hunt, but it may in time!) It may take four to six weeks and sometimes even up to three months for a medication to kick in at its best! (Oh, that dog does hunt after all!)

Here's where the art and science of medicine are equally important. Another call for patience as well. Fortunately you may feel better sooner, but it's also easy to give up before you see your medication doing its best work. (That dog's a splendid hunter!) If only patience could be dolled out generously at the family reunion!

### ***Even More Patience!***

Side effects often precede the benefits of many psych meds. Many side effects are uncomfortable and a very few need to be reported right away. Be sure to ask your doctor about which side effects to report right away and which ones you can be patient with. Nearly all side effects will require patience rather than action.

But the patience with side effects has an up side. Many—if not most—side effects will go away after you have been on the medication for a while. Patience with side effects pays off faster than you might expect, sometimes within a week or two.

The nervous system of our body has two parts called the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The sympathetic nervous system kicks in for the so-called flight, fight or freeze response. The parasympathetic system kicks in for every day things like digestion, normal bodily functions and even sex.

Many of the side effects of psych medications affect the parasympathetic system. This means

that symptoms such as dry mouth, nausea, constipation and diarrhea can be common. Sexual performance can also be affected.

Side effects can be temporary, so give your parasympathetic system a chance to bounce back. But if side effects continue to bother you, talk to your doctor about ways to manage. In some cases the medication will need to be changed. But these cousins in the family of medications may be ones you can live with after all. And you needn't keep family secrets when side effects arise.

### ***Family Secrets***

Don't keep family secrets about the psychiatric medications you are taking. Instead, write down your concerns and take them with you to your next appointment. Your doctor or prescriber should be willing to work with you in a supportive way while you try medications. Your overall goal is to feel better and stay well for as long as possible.

It's challenging to have patience to find the right medication mix, to allow time for new medications to work and to see whether side effects will diminish or resolve. Understanding the family secrets of psych meds can help, but once you learn the family secrets, don't keep them to yourself. Talking to your doctor and to others who have been through the experience of finding the best mix of medications can also boost your morale and help you have patience.

Family members and friends, you be patient too. Taking psych medications is not like popping an aspirin for a headache. Don't expect instant results. Be supportive of your loved one during the process of figuring out the best mix of medications, psychotherapy and recovery skills.

Have appropriate expectations of the process of finding mental wellness in the context

of bipolar disorder. There is every reason to have hope, but you may need a good dose of patience before you see your hopes fulfilled. When you marry into a family it takes time to meet the cousins and size them up. The same is true with medications. With patience you may want to be pals with your meds because you feel so much better.

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## 10 Quick Tips for Managing Medications

1. **Keep a notebook or computer document listing your medications.**
2. **Take a written list of questions when you see your doctor or prescriber.**
3. **Know the reason each medication is prescribed.**
4. **For questions on how to take medications (with or without food), ask your pharmacist.**
5. **Plan ahead when you change your routine so you don't miss taking medications.**
6. **For those medications you take with meals, carry a protein bar with you in case you skip a meal or eat late.**
7. **Know the side effects of your medications.**
8. **Check with your doctor before taking over-the-counter medicines or herbal supplements.**
9. **Make certain every doctor you see knows what medicines you are on.**
10. **Use a weekly or daily pillbox to avoid missing doses.**

### **Share BeyondBipolar Newsletter With Others**

If you are on the email list for the newsletter, go to the email you received and click on "forward email" in the lower left corner. If you are not yet signed up for the email list, go to [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com) and navigate to the e-newsletter page. The archive of previous issues can be found at [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com).

If you wish to use articles for your website or to print more than 50 copies, please ask permission by emailing [beyondbipolar@mac.com](mailto:beyondbipolar@mac.com).

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Jane Mountain, MD, is the author of *Bipolar Disorder: Insights for Recovery* and *Beyond Bipolar: Principles for Recovery*. She is a regular contributor for the *ISBD Global*, newsletter of the International Society for Bipolar Disorders. Dr. Mountain is the founder and one of the peer leaders of the Depression/Bipolar Recovery Group of Midtown Denver. She is a member of the Honorary Board of the Mental Health Association of Colorado. Her website can be found at [www.beyondbipolar.com](http://www.beyondbipolar.com).

If you are interested in having Dr. Mountain speak at your work site, ask for her talk *Mental Health In The Workplace* by calling 303.329.3364 or emailing her at [beyondbipolar@mac.com](mailto:beyondbipolar@mac.com).