



BIPOLAR DISORDERS Factsheet

November 2021

What is sleep deprivation for bipolar disorder?

Sleep deprivation, or 'wake therapy', involves being deprived of total sleep for approximately 36 hours straight, or partially sleeping for only 3 to 4 hours followed by 20 to 21 hours of wakefulness. This therapy has been associated with rapid improvements in depressed mood but may also trigger mania. Studies have used various treatment formats in the number, timing, and duration of sleep deprivation cycles to determine which works best for people with bipolar disorder.

What is the evidence for sleep deprivation for bipolar disorder?

Moderate quality evidence shows total sleep deprivation can improve depression in around half of people receiving the treatment. It is particularly effective when accompanied by mood stabilizers or antidepressants. There were no further improvements when adding sleep phase advance or bright light treatment, or when adding more than one sleep deprivation exposure.

Moderate to low quality evidence finds a medium-sized improvement in depression with total sleep deprivation plus medication compared to medication alone. This effect may remain for up to 4 weeks post-treatment. Adding mood medication after 10 days of total sleep deprivation treatment improved depression and increased rates of remission by 3 months. Around 4% of patients had an episode of mania or hypomania with total sleep deprivation.

For further information see the technical table



NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about bipolar disorder or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

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