

BeyondBipolar Newsletter

Clarity and hope
for those seeking
mental wellness

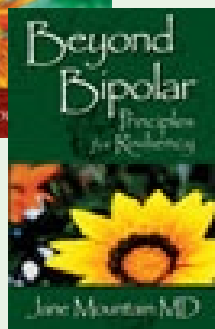
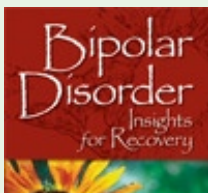
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Welcome to *BeyondBipolar*, a Newsletter focused on mental wellness for those who experience bipolar personally and in their families.

This issue the newsletter features two articles by Dr. Mountain. 1. *Sailing Through the Holidays*, and , 2. *Rough Sailing During the Holidays*. The first is for all readers. The second is also for everyone, but has a family emphasis.

This issue also has information about **Upcoming Seminars** (see page 2 in this newsletter for more details) and other speaking engagements by Dr. Mountain.

Sailing Through the Holidays

SAILING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS can be a difficult journey. But add bipolar disorder to the mix, you may find yourself sailing through stormy waters. Spending some time planning ahead can make the journey smoother and help you develop options when the course gets difficult.

Expectations and pace can drive our ship toward rocky shoals or place us in the doldrums. If we internalize the expectations of others or fail to make realistic expectations for ourselves, we can be deeply disappointed. The pace of our daily life is important in helping manage mood. challenges are, *we must be happy.* (To read the full article, turn to page 3.)

Rough Sailing During the Holidays

Bipolar disorder seriously affects families as well as individuals and it has potential to cause rough sailing during the holidays. As a family member or friend of someone with bipolar disorder, it can be helpful to spend some time considering the impact of the holidays on a family dealing with bipolar disorder.

Some of the most challenging issues in families dealing with bipolar disorder during the holidays are those of disclosure, embarrassment and guilt. Let's take each of these separately and see how they might play out during the holiday season. Then I'd like to make a few suggestions for parents of children and adolescents who have bipolar disorder.

Much of the family's energy has been taken up with this challenge, and it is hard for family to get beyond thinking about their struggles. (To read the full article, turn to page 5.)

Share BeyondBipolar Newsletter With Others

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not yet signed up for the email list, go to www.beyondbipolar.com and navigate to the e-newsletter page. The archive of previous issues can be found at 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.

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Beyond Bipolar: Principles for Resiliency

Dr. Mountain's new book brings you street knowledge, and will help you to go beyond bipolar to mental wellness. Watch for its release.

Seminars by Jane Mountain, MD!

Seminars planned for Denver

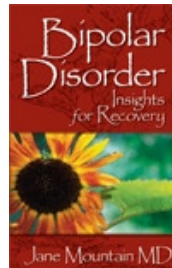
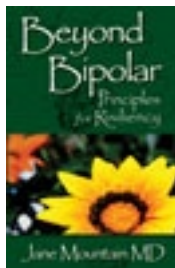
A variety of seminars about bipolar disorder are being planned for the near future. Come gain clarity and hope for recovery. Here's what others have said about Dr. Mountain's seminars:

"Thank you for the information you shared on Saturday morning. Despite being a psychology major 30 years ago, reading many books on bipolar, there were basic concepts that remained unclear to me. You are a gifted speaker in using words that illuminate ideas."

"I wanted to thank you again for the classes that you gave. I really benefited from each of them. Learning lots and identifying with many of the things you talked about. It was very helpful, and I do hope you offer other seminars in the future."

To learn more about Dr. Mountain's upcoming seminars and other speaking engagements, navigate to www.beyondbipolar.com, then go to the Schedule page.

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) or from Amazon.com.

Sailing through the Holidays

SAILING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS can be a difficult journey. But add bipolar disorder to the mix, you may find yourself sailing through stormy waters. Spending some time planning ahead can make the journey smoother and help you develop options when the course gets difficult.

Expectations and pace can drive our ship toward rocky shoals or place us in the doldrums. If we internalize the expectations of others or fail to make realistic expectations for ourselves, we can be deeply disappointed.

The pace of our daily life is important in helping manage mood. Pacing ourselves through the holidays can help us avoid a too low or too high mood.

Your Map for the Happiness Expectation

During the bustle of the holiday season, a clear message is that, no matter what our individual challenges are, *we must be happy*. You need your own map to navigate this rocky shoal.

On the one hand, you may be experiencing symptoms of depression that make you feel seriously out of step with the happiness expectation. On the other hand, you may be getting into the happiness mode to the point that you

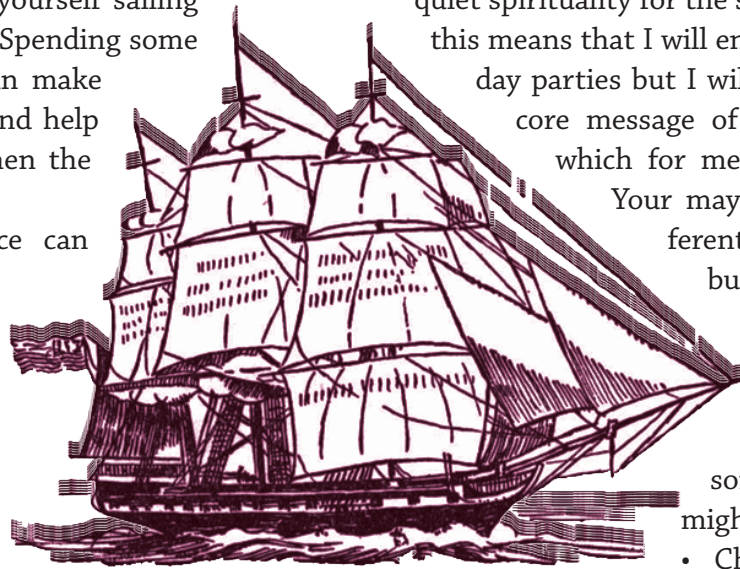
experience the higher moods of bipolar disorder that steer you away from mental wellness. Here are ways to draw your own map to manage the happiness expectation:

- Consider what your main focus of the season will be. Do you want a quiet holiday season? Is your family the focus of this time? Are the holidays religious for you? For example, I usually choose a focus of quiet spirituality for the season. For me this means that I will enjoy a few holiday parties but I will focus on the core message of the holidays, which for me are religious.

Your may choose a different focus such as building family relationships, traveling or whatever your personal interests might be.

- Choose a day early in the holiday season to plan your activities. Include members of your family and significant others in the planning, and also plan some activities just for yourself. Planning ahead is a great way to map your own expectations and manage the expectations of others. Too many invitations? "I'm sorry but I already have other plans for that day." Too few invitations during a lonely time of year? Plan to spend the days of a particular holiday with as a volunteer or choose another activity. In my family, Christmas Day could become a lonely time because our celebration with others is on Christmas Eve. Taking in a movie has become just the thing for us to make the day special.

- Think of the holidays as a season during



which you can take in celebration in small doses. If all your expectations and focus are on one or two days, those days can sweep you to the high tide of mania or the low tide of depression. Also plan something special for after the holidays so you can look forward to something other than the post holiday season letdown. It can be simple such as going for coffee with a friend in mid-January, but plan it in advance so you know you have something to savor in the days after the holidays.

- Gift giving is a strong expectation for many during the holidays. This activity can fuel buying sprees. It can foster anxiety over which gifts to buy and for whom. If bipolar disorder has taken a toll on your finances, gift giving expectations can become stressful for you.

Here are some suggestions:

- i. Budget and plan your gift giving to stay within your needs.
- ii. Shop at smaller stores or different times of the year to avoid buying sprees and the hyper-stimulation of a larger store or mall.
- iii. Buy one or two gifts at a time instead of trying to do it all at once.
- iv. Make a list before you go shopping online.
- v. Buy or make a few inexpensive presents to have on hand for those times when someone gives you a gift you had not expected. (Only make presents if this is easy and fun for you. Don't buy into the expectation of becoming Martha Stewart.)
- vi. Agree in your family that you will give one main gift and some gag gifts. If your family is large draw names instead of buying for everyone.
- vii. Instead of a gift to a particular person,

give to a non-profit in honor of someone. The gift can fit your budget and the other person doesn't have to know the amount of the gift.

As you map out the holidays, ask yourself what additional expectations may need to be considered.

Pacing as a Compass for the Holiday Season

To seek mental wellness when you have bipolar disorder, pacing yourself and your activities is extremely important. Pacing helps you avoid the shoals of hyper-stimulation with the fueling of mania and the doldrums of depression. Here are three ideas to get you started.

- Our schedules can go askew during the holidays and this can lead to unstable mood. Try to keep your schedule as even as possible by keeping your wake and sleep time consistent. If you are traveling east or west, you may take a few days prior to and after the trip to gradually work into the new schedule. Allowing an extra day to rest following a trip before going back to work is a great trick if you can manage it. If you are traveling a long distance, ask your doctor about help to make sure you get adequate sleep.
- Often families or others choose a pace that is not helpful. This happens easily at family gatherings. If family gatherings exhaust, embarrass or stress you, plan to avoid, mitigate or relieve these stressors.

Here are some plans to select from ahead of time to keep yourself on pace:

- Instead of attending the family gathering, send a letter explaining that you had other plans but that you are thinking of those present
- Spend a pre-determined amount of time at the gathering. When you arrive (or even

weeks before to allow time for getting used to the idea) tell your host you will be staying that length of time only

- Plan to take a stress break during the gathering. This may be a time in the kitchen helping with cleanup, a short walk or pulling a (calm) relative aside to a quiet room to talk about something you enjoy together
- If you are expecting an embarrassing question from your uncle, plan your answer or action in advance. You may choose to simply walk away or to deflect the attention away from yourself. Here's a great phrase I can't wait to try, "When did you start thinking of me as being lazy or sick?"
- Pace is part of our biological rhythms, and it has plenty to do with mood. Pace the taking of your medications and put into place any reminders you might need during a busy season. Your biological rhythms can be thrown off by street drugs, alcohol and caffeine. Plan to keep yourself out of situations where these are readily available and in which others will try to get you to indulge with them.

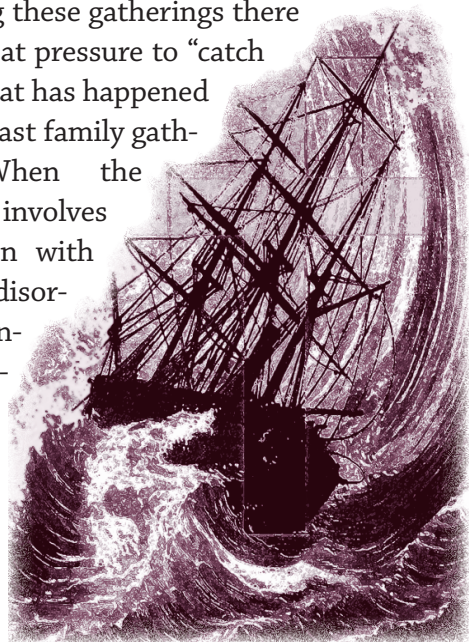
Take your map and compass along whenever you celebrate holidays. Your map will allow you to set reasonable and satisfying expectations. Your compass will help you stay on pace. Best wishes for smooth sailing!

Rough Sailing during the Holidays

BIPOLAR DISORDER SERIOUSLY AFFECTS FAMILIES as well as individuals and it has potential to cause rough sailing during the holidays. As a family member or friend of someone with bipolar disorder, it can be helpful to spend some time considering the impact of the holidays on a family dealing with bipolar disorder.

Some of the most challenging issues in families dealing with bipolar disorder during the holidays are those of disclosure, embarrassment and guilt. Let's take each of these separately and see how they might play out during the holiday season. Then I'd like to make a few suggestions for parents of children and adolescents who have bipolar disorder.

Disclosure: Often the major holiday activities revolve around gatherings with extended family. During these gatherings there can be great pressure to "catch up" on what has happened since the last family gathering. When the "catch up" involves the person with bipolar disorder, the inner pressure to disclose the illness to others may be intense.



Much of the family's energy has been taken up with this challenge, and it is hard for family to get beyond thinking about their struggles.

The simple fact is that we *never have to* disclose to everyone what we have been challenged with. In some cases where family members have no way of processing this information or an understanding of how they can react supportively, disclosure can become an experience that will not be positive.

If the person or persons in the family who have bipolar disorder have chosen not to disclose a diagnosis, you may betray their trust if you "catch up" with family members by talking about it. If disclosure has already occurred, your "catch up" should not focus around an illness. At a family gathering we can choose to make our "catch up" around positive events.

Remember, none of us want to be thought of as an illness. Too often it is heard that someone "is bipolar". If a family member had cancer, we would never say that that person "is cancer". Likewise, a person cannot "be bipolar" but rather has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Your "catch up" is about the person who has bipolar disorder, not the illness experience.

Embarrassment: It's especially difficult when conversations focus on a sibling or cousin of the person with bipolar disorder, recounting all of that person's accomplishments and then brushing over what may have been a much more challenging year for the person with bipolar disorder. If bipolar disorder has caused any kind of disability, if the person with bipolar disorder is having difficulty with work or school, think ahead of the positives you can emphasize instead of allowing a void in which

the person with bipolar disorder becomes a non-person.

In my work I meet or correspond with a large number of people with bipolar disorder as well as other psychiatric illnesses. One thing I have noticed is the courage they express in facing daily life. If John has bipolar disorder, you may be able to comment like this, "John has had a challenging year, but I see his courage growing steadily. Or how about, "Anita has been a dear niece to me during the past few months and

"You are doing the best you can with the resources you have available."

I enjoy her friendly visits so much." We can focus on qualities rather accomplishments when that is appropriate.

Embarrassment about a person's illness is inappropriate but it happens. No one chooses to have bipolar disorder either individually or as a family. It is a serious illness that is, for the most part, socially and culturally not understood or accepted. If you are embarrassed about facing this challenge, learn more about bipolar disorder and get the help you need so you can be proud of how your family confronts challenges with problem solving and recovery skills.

Guilt: The holiday season is an opportune time to get stuck in a process of guilt. We tend to sum up our lives at the end-of-the-year mark. Your personal or family life may not have been what you expected this past year. The challenge of bipolar disorder may have played a role in your feelings.

Many family members, especially parents, feel guilt that they passed on the genetic make-up that was a factor in their child's illness. Other family members can experience guilt over not dealing with the situation "well enough".

A lot of pressure is put on family members to handle crises and day to day living with bipolar disorder. Almost never is there any education provided about how to do this.

Bipolar disorder runs in families and affects them significantly. The resiliency we need in our communities is seldom present. Often the most essential treatment resources are lacking. *This is not your fault. You are doing the best you can with the resources you have available.* Have the grace to forgive yourself so you can move on without bitterness or low self esteem. If you don't have the grace to forgive, ask for it, since grace always comes as a gift.

For parents of young children and adolescents with bipolar disorder

I'd like to end with a few suggestions for parents of young people. Some of these may help parents of adults as well.

- Hyper-stimulation around holidays is difficult for children with bipolar disorder. Those of us who have this illness have brains that are not able to filter out stimuli in our environment. Keeping the noise and visual stimuli down a notch or two can help avoid a melt down. A quiet break with someone the child enjoys in a separate room can be a mood-saver during a family gathering
- Siblings of children with bipolar disorder can feel left out when parents are daily making accommodations for a child with bipolar disorder. Sometimes it needs to be their turn for accommodation. Don't try to make up for this with more presents but rather with your presence.
- If possible, create a holiday tradition of spending a special time with each child. If you can't manage this alone, perhaps a close relative or friend can help you out with the preparations or by caring for your other children. It doesn't have to be fancy;

it just has to be your presence and undivided attention for that child alone.

- Take care of yourself first. Do something alone or with someone you love that takes you out of the pressures of being a parent of a child with special needs.
- One thing to consider is the disruption the holidays have on daily routines. Disruption of routine can be a challenge that destabilizes mood for the child or adolescent with bipolar disorder. Look for a balance where the child can decide on limiting some activities in order to feel better.

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. Jane is the founder and one of the peer leaders of the Depression/Bipolar Recovery Group of Midtown Denver. Her website can be found at 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.