

Louise's story

Louise (pseudonym) has experienced mental ill health since she was 18. She was recently diagnosed as Bipolar. Louise was keen to share the symptoms that she experiences to help people understand more about her illness, as well as to highlight the differences between depression and Bipolar disorder. Louise has requested her story is shared under a pseudonym (a false name) in order to protect her identity. Her story was recorded by Mind Your Head and she signed consent for her story to be shared in this way.

TRIGGER WARNING: This story contains personal reflections of mental ill health relating to Bipolar and depression.

It started as depression; severe depression.

I was 18 and had my whole life ahead of me yet all I could focus on was the past, the things I had lost; the people I had lost. There was just this gaping hole that couldn't be filled or forgotten, no matter how much I drank. A year and a half of sticking with the same routine - wake up, party, repeat - saw me end up dropping out of university and moving back to my home town.

Throughout this time I had been attending the doctors, was put on anti-depressants and partook in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions. They helped put me on the right path and taught me how to think in a more positive way but there was still this niggling feeling that just wouldn't go, no matter how much I put to use the professional advice.

A year or so later it did. It got so much better. So much so I stopped taking my medication, stopped going to the doctors and just lived my life. I could do anything. I went out with my friends, I made new friends, I achieved things, I worked really hard at work, and I was super-productive. How good was life!

I moved to Shetland, and at first I was really enthused. I gained the best employment opportunity I'd had in my life so far and thought I really excelled. In fact, I thought quite highly of myself. I was oblivious to the obvious snubbing I gave to my work mates - but who were they to me? I was going places!

Slowly, though, the depression started creeping back. But I remembered the CBT I'd received and it confused me. I couldn't find the trigger points. It was like the depression was just there and I couldn't do anything to try and stem the feelings. I tried to carry on though, gained employment elsewhere and ignored the increasingly negative thoughts that were blinding my thought processes. Things came to a head and I went back to the doctors. They prescribed me the same anti-depressants as last time and I took confidence that they worked last time so I could look to the future.

But something different happened this time. Almost two weeks to the day I'd started taking the tablets I woke up and it was like something inside of me just clicked. PING! I was ready and raring to go. Woo! These pills have really kicked in! Or so I thought. I was nearly uncontrollable for the next two weeks, full of energy, talking quickly to my work colleagues about things that shouldn't be spoken about in a working environment and acting like a child.

Are you drunk? What have you been taking? You're mental! Calm down for God's sake!

I went back to the doctors. I knew something was wrong and I was putting my career at risk but at the same time I enjoyed feeling like this. After so long of being depressed it was refreshing to have this completely different outlook on life. Plus, I didn't appear to have a guilt mechanism, so I could do things and be selfish without any self-reproach. Things like spending money I didn't have.

It took a while to get an appointment with the psychiatrist, but I did in the end. I described to him what was happening, how I was feeling, what the people around me were saying about my behaviour, what trouble I'd gotten myself into. They diagnosed me with Bipolar and prescribed me anti-psychotics whilst telling me to stop taking the anti-depressants. These would help deal with the highs initially but then should also help any depression subside.

So this was a few months ago and I can safely say that this is not the end. It's barely just the beginning. I've got this for life; will be on medication for life. I just need to learn to deal with it.

Bipolar disorder is a condition that affects your moods, which can swing from one extreme to another. If you have bipolar disorder, you will have periods or 'episodes' of: Depression - where you feel very low and lethargic Mania - where you feel very high and overactive (less severe mania is known as hypomania). Bipolar is usually a long-term condition. Find out more www.mindyourhead.org.uk

CBT stands for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. It is a type of therapy that uses techniques to help understand how thoughts, feelings and behaviours are linked. It looks for ways to identify unhelpful thinking patterns & techniques to combat these.