

# Next Steps:

Getting the Help You Need  
To Reach Wellness



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

We've been there.  
We can help.

# Depression and Bipolar Disorder: Treatment and Recovery

**D**epression and bipolar disorder are mood disorders, real physical illnesses that affect a person’s moods, thoughts, body, energy and emotions. Both conditions, especially bipolar disorder, tend to follow a cyclical course, meaning they have ups and downs.

Treatment for these conditions can also have ups and downs. As much as we may want it to, wellness often does not happen overnight. It is normal to wish you could feel better faster or worry that you will never feel better. However, you *can* feel better, and you can do things to help yourself.

Relief of symptoms is only the first step in treating depression or bipolar disorder. Wellness, or recovery, is a return to a life that you care about. Recovery happens when your illness stops getting in the way of your life.

You decide what recovery means to you. Talk to your health care provider (HCP) about what you need to reach this recovery. Your HCP can help you find the treatment(s) and/or medication(s) that work best for you. Along the way, you have a right to ask questions about the treatments you are getting and to choose the treatments you want. It can also be helpful to work with a therapist, loved one, or fellow support group participant to help define your recovery. Your definition may change at different times in your life.

At times, depression and bipolar disorder might make it seem difficult to set a goal for yourself. It might feel almost impossible to think about the things that you hope for or care about. But goal-setting is important no matter where you are on your path to wellness. Work on what you can when you can. It is all part of creating an effective and lasting wellness plan.

**Ask yourself: What does recovery mean to me?**

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# Creating a Wellness Plan

A wellness plan puts you in control of your recovery and gives you a clear picture of what you're working for every day. It also prepares you, and those who support you, to handle the more difficult moments that the conditions might bring.

The following questions will help you start developing your personal wellness plan. You can also create your wellness plan online by visiting [www.FacingUs.org/Plan](http://www.FacingUs.org/Plan).

## Setting Goals

### Ask yourself:

What motivates me? \_\_\_\_\_

What interests me? \_\_\_\_\_

What would I do more, if I could? \_\_\_\_\_

What do I care about, or what did I care about before my illness?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What brings me joy? \_\_\_\_\_

What are my hopes and dreams? \_\_\_\_\_

It helps to start small and work up to larger goals. You might want to begin by setting one small goal for yourself at the beginning of each day. As you move forward with your recovery, look at the different areas of your life and think about your short- and long-term goals.

### Short-term goals might include:

- Be out of bed by \_\_\_\_:00 AM
- Finish one household chore
- Call a DBSA support group
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Long-term goals might include:

- Get training or experience for a job
- Change a living situation, e.g., find an apartment
- Build a relationship with a friend or family member
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Remember to take small steps at first. A goal such as “move to a new city” can be difficult to visualize and plan all at once. Ask yourself what you need to do first. What small thing can you do now that will help you eventually reach this goal?

## Creating the Life that You Want: Ten Steps to Accomplishing a Goal

1. State as clearly as possible, in a positive way, what it is that you want to create in your life.

*Within the next (time frame) \_\_\_\_\_, I choose to \_\_\_\_\_*

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2. Be clear why you want this and how your life will be different once you achieve this goal.

*I believe the benefits of doing this will be \_\_\_\_\_*

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*If I decide not to do this, it will mean \_\_\_\_\_*

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3. Recognize what you have going for you to help you achieve this goal.

*Three things that will help me create the future I want are \_\_\_\_\_*

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4. Understand the challenges that exist.

*Three things that may keep me from creating the future I want are \_\_\_\_\_*

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5. Be especially aware of the negative self-talk that sabotages and undermines your attempts to succeed.

*The negative and destructive self-talk that I need to watch out for is \_\_\_\_\_*

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*I will combat this negative self-talk by \_\_\_\_\_*

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6. Be clear about what you need to achieve this goal in terms of skills, resources, support systems, etc.

*I need to learn the following skills in order to accomplish this goal*

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*I need to consult these resources*

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*I need to develop these supports*

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7. List the 3–5 major actions that you need to take to start moving toward this goal.

*I need to get started by doing these things*

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8. Think of ways to care for yourself as you work to achieve this goal.

*I will take care of myself while working to create the future I want by*

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9. Stay focused on what you want to create, not on the difficulties you might be having.

*I will keep myself focused on what I want to create and the benefits this will bring me by*

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10. Be easy on yourself! Have fun! Enjoy it! Enjoy life!

*I will remember to be easy on myself. I will work to enjoy life by doing these things*

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# Wellness Achievement and Maintenance

Two goals you might work toward are getting well and staying well. Start by asking yourself these questions.

## Defining My Wellness

*What am I like when I am feeling/doing well?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*What are the things that help me maintain or regain a good quality of life?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*What can I do to maintain my wellness?*

Daily \_\_\_\_\_

Weekly \_\_\_\_\_

Monthly \_\_\_\_\_

## Early Warning Signs

*What early warning signs of my illness have I or others noticed?*

Feelings \_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts \_\_\_\_\_

Emotions \_\_\_\_\_

Sensations \_\_\_\_\_

Actions \_\_\_\_\_

Words \_\_\_\_\_

*What can I do when these warning signs occur?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Who can help me?* \_\_\_\_\_

*How can I get in touch with them?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What should they say or do?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*What are some things I can do that might help me feel better?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Crisis Plan Management

*Use another sheet of paper if necessary. Give a copy to all of your support people.*

What are the signs that I am in crisis? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the signs that I need someone to take over making decisions for me and/or go with me to the hospital? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which person or people would I prefer to help me in crisis? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which medications or treatments are most helpful if a crisis occurs?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which medications or treatments should be avoided? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where would I prefer to be treated or hospitalized if that is necessary?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which treatment facilities do I want to avoid? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medications I am currently taking and why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What can others do for me that would help reduce my symptoms or make me more comfortable? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How do I want to feel when I have recovered from this crisis? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Things I need to do for myself every day while I am recovering from a crisis:

\_\_\_\_\_

Things that can wait until I feel better: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Getting the Most from Your HCP

## Seeing Eye-to-Eye

A good relationship with your health care provider (HCP) should be collaborative, with open communication. They should pay attention to your needs, goals and background. Your relationship with your mental health professional should be a partnership. The two of you will work together to find a treatment plan that works best for you.

Even if you have had negative experiences with HCPs or mental health treatment in the past, go into your first appointment with the belief that your HCP is concerned about you and wants to help you find your way to mental health.

## Keeping Track

Track your moods, treatment and progress every day. You only need a few minutes each day (e.g., when you are getting ready for bed) to write down a few thoughts about how you felt and acted that day, along with your sleep, meals, medication dosage and other life events. This helps you and your HCP find patterns and identify things that may be triggering your symptoms. You might notice, for example, that many of your bad days come after sleepless nights, or that certain places or things tend to trigger your symptoms. It also helps you see how well your treatment is working. You can track this information on DBSA's online Wellness Tracker ([www.DBSAlliance.org/Tracker](http://www.DBSAlliance.org/Tracker)) or by downloading or ordering DBSA's personal mood calendar, or design one that is most helpful to you.

## End Result: Wellness

You and your HCP have the same goal: wellness and for you to have a sustained healthy life. You have a say in your treatment, and your HCP needs to understand and hear your needs and concerns.

If you feel your HCP is not listening to you, keep bringing up your concerns until s/he addresses them. Remember, as a patient, you have a right to be treated with respect and receive good treatment no matter who you are, what your diagnosis is or what type of health benefits you have. Do not be afraid to change your HCP if you are not getting the assistance you need.

## Resolving Concerns with Your HCP

- **Be sure your HCP knows what wellness means to you.** Let your HCP know you want more than just relief from the worst symptoms; you want a productive, quality life.
- **Ask questions.** Find out what to expect from treatment. Know how long it will take your treatment to work, any side effects it might have and what you can do about them.
- **Be honest** with your health care provider regarding your concerns about your illness and treatment.
- **Set a schedule.** Agree to try one method of treatment or medication, and re-evaluate your health in a few days, weeks or months. If you still have symptoms or side effects that interfere with your life, you and your HCP agree to try another treatment. This is helpful when you and your HCP disagree on which treatment to try.
- **Let your HCP know when you have difficulty explaining symptoms.** When you need help the most, it is often the hardest to explain your symptoms. If you let your HCP know you are having trouble, you can work together to find a way to communicate.
- **Educate yourself about your illness.** Learn as much as you can about the symptoms of your illness. If you have questions about your illness, ask your HCP.
- **Educate yourself about your treatment.** The more you understand your treatment and feel involved in your choices, the less likely you are to become discouraged or feel hopeless. Find out what treatments are available now and what is being developed for the future.
- **Keep track of your progress over time.** You know yourself best. You can best tell your HCP how you are feeling and how your illness gets in the way of your life.



- **Let your HCP know if you are uncomfortable with the label of a diagnosis.** Ask if your HCP can hold off on a diagnosis until after you have tried at least one treatment. Agree to treat symptoms as they arise.
- **Know the difference between your symptoms and your true self.** Your HCP can help you separate your true identity from your symptoms by helping you see how your illness affects your behavior. Be open about behaviors you want to change and set goals for making those changes.
- **Educate your loved ones and involve them in treatment** when possible. They can help you spot symptoms, track behaviors and gain perspective. They can also give encouraging feedback and help you make a plan to cope with any future crises.
- **Work on healthy lifestyle choices.** Recovery is also about a healthy lifestyle, which includes regular sleep, healthy eating and physical activity at a level that is right for you.
- **Stay with your medications.** Talk to your HCP about your medication's effects on you, especially side effects that bother you. You might need to take a lower dosage, a higher dosage, or a different medication. You might need to switch your medication time from morning to evening, or take it on a full stomach. There are many options for you and your HCP to try. Side effects can often be reduced or eliminated.
- **Talk with your HCP *first*** if you feel like changing your dosage or stopping your medication. Explain what you want to change and why you think it will help you.

## Treatments for Depression and Bipolar Disorder

### Treatments that Work Can Help You:

- Reach your goals
- Build on the strengths you have and the things you can do
- Plan your health care based on your needs
- Live your life without the interference of symptoms

The best treatment for depression or bipolar disorder may include medication, talk therapy, new technological treatments, healthy lifestyle choices, and support from others who understand in a DBSA support group.

## Medications for Depression and Bipolar Disorder

Your HCP might prescribe one or more medications to treat your symptoms. These may include:

- **Antidepressants:** These medications help lift the symptoms of depression. There are several different types of antidepressants, and the effects of specific medications vary widely from person to person.
- **Mood stabilizers:** These medications can help balance your highs and lows. Some mood stabilizer medications are called anticonvulsants, because they were originally used to treat epilepsy.
- **Antipsychotics:** These medications are called antipsychotics because there were originally used to treat hallucinations or psychotic symptoms. Their most common use now is to reduce or prevent symptoms of mania. Some can also prevent or reduce symptoms of depression.

*For more detailed information on medications, download our “Finding Peace of Mind” brochure at [www.DBSAAlliance.org/Publications](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org/Publications).*

## Questions to Ask Your HCP

- How does this treatment work in my brain? What chemicals or processes does it affect?
- When will I start to feel some improvement? What symptoms should this treatment relieve?
- What might the side effects of my treatment be? How can I cope?
- How can I recognize problems if they happen?
- Is there anything I can do to make this treatment more effective?
- Is this the usual treatment for my illness? If not, why did you choose it?
- What is our next step if this treatment is not effective?
- How will this treatment affect the treatments I’m receiving for other illnesses?
- How can I reach you in an emergency?

## Talk Therapy

There are many types of talk therapy that can help you address issues in your life and learn new ways to cope with your illness. Goal-setting is an important part of talk therapy. Talk therapy can also help you to:



- Understand your illness
- Overcome fears or insecurities
- Cope with stress
- Make sense of past traumatic experiences
- Separate your true personality from the mood swings caused by your illness
- Identify triggers that may worsen your symptoms
- Improve relationships with family and friends
- Establish a stable, dependable routine
- Develop a plan for coping with crises
- Understand why things bother you and what you can do about them
- End destructive habits such as drinking, using drugs, overspending or risky sex
- Address symptoms like changes in eating or sleeping habits, anger, anxiety, irritability or unpleasant feelings

# Neuromodulation Technological Treatments

Several new treatments use electrical or magnetic stimulation to modulate (or change) brain function. Some of them are officially approved to treat certain types of mood disorders, and some are still experimental.

## Vagus Nerve Stimulation

The vagus nerve is one of the primary communication pathways from the major organs of the body to the brain. Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS Therapy) is delivered through a small pulse generator, similar to a pacemaker, which is implanted in the left chest area and connected to the vagus nerve in the left side of the neck. The pulse generator sends small pulses to the vagus nerve, and the vagus nerve then delivers these pulses directly to the brain.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved VNS Therapy for people 18 years of age or older who are experiencing chronic or recurrent treatment resistant depression (depression that has not responded adequately to multiple treatment attempts). Studies have shown that VNS Therapy can have beneficial results, especially for individuals who have not found relief with several other treatments. The treatment has been shown to be equally effective in both unipolar depression and bipolar disorder.

## Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) was developed in 1985 and has been studied as a treatment for mental illness since 1995. In TMS, a special electromagnet delivers short bursts of energy to stimulate nerve cells in the brain. This helps correct the existing chemical imbalance. Research studies have shown this treatment can have beneficial results when antidepressant medication has not been helpful. It has been shown to be as effective as other depression treatments, and is generally free of the side effects that are most commonly seen with antidepressant medication or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

TMS can be performed in a physician's office. It does not require surgery, hospitalization or anesthesia. The FDA has approved TMS for treatment of

depression when at least one antidepressant medication has not helped. It is less clear if TMS is effective when several antidepressant medications (or other treatments) have not worked.

## **Other Neuromodulation Treatments**

Some other related new treatments are being developed and evaluated. Those include: Magnetic Stimulation Therapy (using a magnetic field to cause a seizure), Direct Current Stimulation (using electrical current to stimulate the brain from the outside) and Deep Brain Stimulation (implanting electrodes in the brain to stimulate areas of the brain directly). None of these are currently approved as treatments for depression or bipolar disorder. For now, they are all experimental treatments.

## **ECT: Looking at Where We've Been to Understand Where We're Going**

In the 1930s, researchers discovered that applying a small amount of electrical current to the brain caused small mild seizures that changed brain chemistry. Over the years, much has been done to make this form of treatment, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), milder and easier for patients to tolerate. It is very effective in treating severe depression. However, there can be side effects such as confusion and memory loss. The procedure must be performed in a hospital with general anesthesia. Today's electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is nothing like the ECT of a few decades ago or the one that you see in some movies.

*For more detailed information on Neuromodulation Treatments, download our "Treatment Technologies for Mood Disorders" brochure at [www.DBSAAlliance.org/Publications](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org/Publications).*

Scientists are still looking for treatments that work better and with fewer side effects. They are gaining new understanding of the brain, the nervous system and its chemicals, and the relationship between mood and other physical disorders every day.



## Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle is always important. Even if symptoms of depression or bipolar disorder make things like physical activity, healthy eating or regular sleep difficult, you can improve your moods by improving your health.

Take advantage of the good days you have. On these days, do something healthy for yourself. Take a minute to think about what a healthy lifestyle would look like for you. Jot down your thoughts below.

### Sleep

How much sleep do I need each day? \_\_\_\_\_

What can I do to encourage sleep? \_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise

What kind of physical activities appeal to me? \_\_\_\_\_

How many times a week will I perform this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

For how long each time? \_\_\_\_\_

### Nutrition

What changes would I like to make to my eating habits? \_\_\_\_\_

What can I do to promote these changes? \_\_\_\_\_

### Relaxation and Leisure

What are some leisure activities I enjoy? \_\_\_\_\_

How many times per week will I engage in these activities? \_\_\_\_\_

For how long each time? \_\_\_\_\_

A talk about lifestyle changes should be a part of your goal-setting with your HCP.

## DBSA Chapters and Support Groups: With You on Your Wellness Journey

One of the most helpful things in your recovery can be your DBSA chapter and support group. With a grassroots network of DBSA chapters that offer more than 700 support groups, no one with a mood disorder needs to feel alone or ashamed.

Each DBSA support group is facilitated by a volunteer with lived experience of a mood disorder. Participants are people with mood disorders and/or their friends/family members. You can talk with others about your treatment, experiences and wellness goals openly and honestly.

DBSA support group participants say that their groups:

- Provide a safe and welcoming place for acceptance and understanding.
- Give them the opportunity to reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have “been there.”
- Motivate them to follow their treatment plans.
- Help them understand that mood disorders do not define who they are.
- Help them rediscover strengths and humor they may have thought they had lost.

Visit **[www.DBSAlliance.org/FindSupport](http://www.DBSAlliance.org/FindSupport)** or **contact DBSA at (800) 826-3632** to locate the DBSA chapter or support group nearest you. If there is no group in your area, DBSA can help you start one.

*The members of my DBSA support group reached out to me, and made me realize that I was not alone. If not for the support that I received from this organization, I probably wouldn't be here...*

— DBSA support group participant

# You Are the Most Important Part of Your Wellness Plan

Your treatment plan will be unique to you. It will follow some basic principles and paths, but you and your HCP can adapt it to fit you. A healthy lifestyle and support from people who have been there can help you and your HCP work together to find a way to real and lasting wellness.

## For more information

### **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

(800) 826-3632 • [www.DBSAAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org)

### **DBSA Wellness Plan**

[www.FacingUs.org/Plan](http://www.FacingUs.org/Plan)

### **DBSA Wellness Tracker**

[www.FacingUs.org/Tracker](http://www.FacingUs.org/Tracker)

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### **The Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)**

(800) 789-CMHS (2647) • TDD: (866) 889-2647 • [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov)

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

(800) 421-4211 • [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

(800) 273-TALK • (800) 273-8255 • [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation**

(877) RTMS-4U2 (786-7482) • [www.neuronetics.com](http://www.neuronetics.com)

### **Vagus Nerve Stimulation Therapy**

1-877-NOW-4 VNS (1-877-669-4867) • [www.vnstherapy.com](http://www.vnstherapy.com)

# Quick Symptom Tracker

## Rate Your Symptoms 1-3

- 1 = I am having trouble with this symptom. It is getting in the way of my life and it needs to be addressed right away.
- 2 = I am having trouble with this symptom, but it is not as serious as those rated 1.
- 3 = I have little or no trouble with this symptom.

	Symptom	Rating 1-3
D E P R E S S I O N	Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells	
	Significant changes in appetite, sleep patterns	
	Irritability, anger, worry, agitation, anxiety	
	Pessimism, indifference	
	Loss of energy, tiredness, exhaustion	
	Feelings of guilt or worthlessness	
	Inability to concentrate, indecisiveness	
	Inability to take pleasure in former interests, social withdrawal, feelings of isolation	
	Unexplained aches and pains	
	Recurring thoughts of death or suicide	
<p><b>Suicidal thoughts are very important to treat. If you or someone you care about has thoughts of suicide, get help right away. Contact a medical professional, clergy member, loved one, friend or crisis line such as (800) 273-TALK, or go to an emergency room.</b></p>		
M A N I A	Heightened mood, exaggerated optimism and self-confidence	
	Decreased need for sleep (less than three hours) without fatigue	
	Grandiose delusions, inflated sense of self-importance	
	Excessive irritability, aggressive behavior	
	Increased physical and/or mental activity	
	Racing speech, flight of ideas, impulsiveness	
	Poor judgment, easily distracted, difficulty concentrating	
	Reckless behavior without concern for consequences, such as spending sprees, rash business decisions, erratic driving, sexual indiscretions	
	Auditory hallucinations (hearing voices) or delusions (strong convictions about things that aren't true)	

# DBSA Wellness Tracker

The DBSA Wellness Tracker is one of many customizable tools in the Facing Us Clubhouse at FacingUs.org, your online home for wellness. Use it to monitor, daily or weekly, the many things that influence your health—body and mind—like your overall mood, state of well-being, symptoms, lifestyle factors, medication, and physical health.

You can print reports from the DBSA Wellness Tracker to see your progress, share information with your HCP, and help you determine the next steps in your course of treatment.

## Your Wellness Tracker report will be broken down into four sections:

1. **The DBSA Wellness Tracker OnTrack section** charts your self-reported overall mood and well-being throughout the month. It also provides a summary of your current medications and lists any side effects you have identified as having a severely negative impact on your ability to function as you wish on a daily basis. It provides an overall summary of your moods and state of well-being, flagging entries and/or recording notes that you might want to review in your clinical appointments.
2. **The DBSA Wellness Tracker Symptoms section** charts your self-reported mood disorder symptoms throughout the month. It also provides a summary of any notes you've made about a particular symptom.
3. **The DBSA Wellness Tracker Physical Health section** records key physical health statistics, such as your weight and blood pressure.
4. **The DBSA Wellness Tracker Personal Exercise Log section** records progress on your cardio and resistance exercise goals.

Stay “on track” with the DBSA Wellness Tracker. It’s easy, takes only a few minutes a day, and like the other tools in the Facing Us Clubhouse, it’s free!

Get started at [www.FacingUs.org/Tracker](http://www.FacingUs.org/Tracker).



We've been there.  
We can help.

## Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

**The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)** is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans, account for 90% of the nation's suicides every year, and cost \$23 billion in lost workdays and other workplace losses.

DBSA's peer-based, wellness-oriented, and empowering services and resources are available when people need them, where they need them, and how they need to receive them—online 24/7, in local support groups, in audio and video casts, or in printed materials distributed by DBSA, our chapters, and mental health care facilities across America.

Through more than 700 support groups and nearly 300 chapters, DBSA reaches millions of people each year with in-person and online peer support; current, readily understandable information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

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### Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

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Fax: (312) 642-7243  
Website: [www.DBSAAlliance.org](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org)

*Visit our website for important information, resources, chapter connections, to get involved with advocacy, and more.*

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We hope you found the information in this brochure helpful. If you would like to support DBSA's mission, please consider making a donation by calling (800) 826-3632 or by visiting [www.DBSAAlliance.org/Donate](http://www.DBSAAlliance.org/Donate).

This brochure was reviewed by DBSA Scientific Advisory Board Member, Gregory Simon, MD, MPH Senior Investigator at Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, WA.

**DBSA does not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatment or medication for mood disorders. For advice about specific treatment or medication, patients should consult their physicians and/or mental health professionals.**