

Am J Psychiatry. 2004 Apr;161(4):608-20.

Management of bipolar disorder during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Yonkers KA, Wisner KL, Stowe Z, Leibenluft E, Cohen L, Miller L, Manber R, Viguera A, Suppes T, Altshuler L.

OBJECTIVE: Bipolar disorder affects 0.5%-1.5% of individuals in the United States. The typical age at onset is late adolescence or early adulthood, placing women at risk for episodes throughout their reproductive years. General guidelines for the treatment of bipolar disorder are available from the American Psychiatric Association, but additional issues arise when these guidelines are applied in the treatment of peripartum women. The authors summarize knowledge regarding the management of bipolar disorder during pregnancy and the postpartum period, with a focus on managing mania, hypomania, and the psychotic components of the illness.

METHOD: An expert panel reviewed articles that address the management of bipolar disorder and the consequences of the use of mood stabilizers during pregnancy, and a consensus document was generated.

RESULTS: The treatment of bipolar disorder in pregnant women involves significant challenges. Some mood stabilizers, e.g., sodium valproate and carbamazepine, are human teratogens. On the other hand, the teratogenicity associated with lithium may have been overestimated in the past.

CONCLUSIONS: Since treatment can be managed most effectively if pregnancy is planned, clinicians should discuss the issue of pregnancy and its management with every bipolar disorder patient who has childbearing potential, regardless of future reproductive plans. Additional research should address the risks of disturbed sleep to pregnant and postpartum women with bipolar disorder, as well as structural and behavioral consequences to offspring when mood stabilizers are used during pregnancy. Longitudinal and cohort studies can promote these efforts. Given the rate of bipolar disorder in the general population, research efforts will need to be broad based and include multiple collaborating centers.