

David, 57

Father of four, research coordinator & film enthusiast who has battled symptoms of bipolar disorder since adolescence, *MELBOURNE*

Father of four, Alzheimer's disease research coordinator and film enthusiast, David, 57, Melbourne, struggled to make sense of his everyday thoughts and feelings for more than three decades.

It wasn't until his early thirties that David first sought professional help. He was however, finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder at 43 years of age.

David's symptoms of bipolar disorder left him struggling to carve out a stable career path and to maintain a stable family life.

Today David is participating in the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study* because, as a research trial coordinator, he appreciates the importance of recruiting study volunteers and wants to use his personal experience to help improve the understanding and treatment of bipolar disorder.



This is David's story.

David spent much of his mid-teens grappling with mood changes and struggling to make sense of everyday life. He mostly recalls feeling highly anxious, and although not recognised at the time, he had started to exhibit signs of clinical depression.

"For many years, I thought the sadness I was experiencing was normal. It wasn't until my early thirties however, that I first spoke to my doctor about my thoughts and feelings.

"It was an extremely lengthy process to find the correct diagnosis. In 2004, at the age of 43, I was finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder and began treatment," said David.

David finds it challenging to articulate the feelings he experiences during a bipolar disorder episode, but upon reflection, describes living with the illness as completely exhausting.

"There are these constant and unrelenting discourses going on in my head. It's rare for me to have a conversation or interaction with someone, even when visiting the local shop, without replaying the scenario in my head for hours.

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“I judge myself for either being too withdrawn or too silly. It would be nice to be able to live in a world where things don’t have to be constantly analysed in my head,” David said.

Living with bipolar disorder has proven detrimental to David’s family life and career. He has been divorced twice and has children from both marriages, but to date, has been unable to open up about his bipolar disorder to his family.

“I experienced some challenging events when growing up, which served to shape my response to how I deal with life, particularly in relation to how I respond emotionally to people and events,” said David.

David has also struggled to keep a constant network of friends and has found it difficult to settle on a career that works for him. Having completed two degrees, he has tried his hand at eight different career paths and lost all of his assets in a failed business venture.

Since being diagnosed with bipolar disorder 14 years ago, David has gleaned vital insights into recognising an impending episode, for which he proactively seeks professional help. Through counselling, medication and a dependable mental health support buddy, David is growing more confident to speak about his illness and to navigate some of his more difficult episodes.

He strongly believes genes and a person’s surrounding environment play a pivotal role in the development of bipolar disorder.

David is urging others to volunteer for the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Study* – a ground-breaking, international collaboration exploring the genetic risk factors associated with the illness and how genes influence one’s response to treatment. QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute is leading the study, and David genuinely hopes his contribution will allow experts to unravel some important answers to help treat bipolar disorder. David is also encouraging others, if comfortable, to share their personal experiences with the illness.

“It can be terrible thinking you’re the only one managing the symptoms of bipolar disorder, so I urge others living with this illness to not be ashamed of sharing their stories. Participating in such an important study allows us to be part of the solution and that’s very empowering.

“Working in research myself, I understand how critical it is to find volunteers who are willing to lend some time to an important cause,” David said.

“You can volunteer for the *Australian Genetics of Bipolar Disorder Study* without even leaving your home, and you’ll be contributing to improving the lives of others, which is a beautiful thing,” David said.

Should you or a loved one be grappling with a mental health issue, and require support, contact the organisations below without delay.

Lifeline – 131 114

Beyondblue – 1300 224 636

MensLine – 1300 789 978

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To coordinate an interview with David, please contact Kirsten Bruce or Holly Hamilton from VIVA! Communications on 02 9968 3741 / 0401 717 566 or 0434 799 839.