

Evidence-based treatment options for Borderline personality disorder (BPD)

Guidance for Psychiatrists, Family Physicians, and Nurse Practitioners



Developed by:

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Borderline personality disorder (BPD) symptoms are most effectively and commonly treated with a combination of psychotherapy and medication. This combination of therapy and medication doesn't treat borderline personality disorder itself but treats the symptoms associated with it.

A. Biological:

Health Canada has not approved any medications for BPD treatment. Anticonvulsants, antidepressants, and antipsychotics are typically prescribed to help treat and manage borderline personality disorder symptoms. A healthcare professional can determine the proper dosage and form of medication on a case-by-case basis.

Anticonvulsants

Anticonvulsants work by helping to stabilize moods and impulsive behavior. Common side effects of anticonvulsants include changes in vision, unusual behavior, and allergic reaction. Some commonly prescribed anticonvulsants include lamotrigine and topiramate:

Antidepressants/Anxiolytics

Antidepressants like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) can help people with borderline personality disorder experience relief from symptoms such as emotional reactivity, depression, and anxiety.

Antipsychotics

Antipsychotics are used to help reduce impulsive behavior, anger, anxiety, and other similar emotions that result from BPD. Antipsychotic medications like aripiprazole or brexpiprazole can be beneficial as they have favorable side effect profile.

B. Psychological therapy:

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) focuses on mindfulness or paying attention to the present emotion. DBT teaches skills to control intense emotions, reduce self-destructive behavior, manage distress, and improve relationships. Treatment includes individual therapy sessions, skills training in a group setting, and phone coaching as needed. DBT is the most studied treatment for BPD and the one shown to be most effective.

Mentalization-based therapy (MBT) and Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can also benefit individuals with BPD.