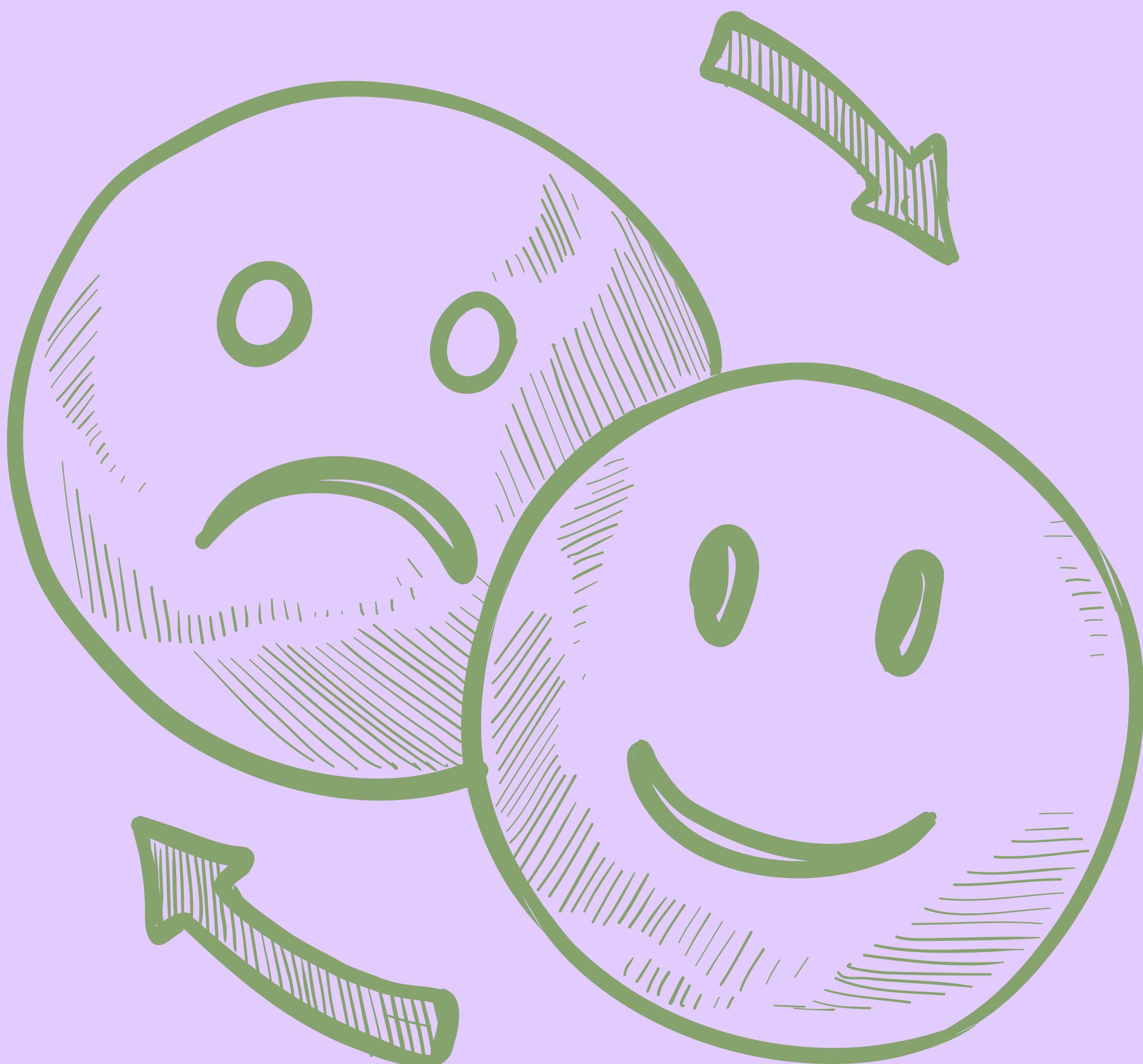


Understanding & Managing Mood Swings



Project EDSA
Resource Library
*for individuals in
recovery*

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What are Mood Swings?

Mood swings refer to noticeable and sometimes abrupt changes in emotional state. A person might feel happy and optimistic one moment, then suddenly become irritable or sad. These fluctuations may happen over hours or even minutes and may not always have a clear trigger.

Mood swings **do not always indicate a mental health disorder**. In many cases, they can result from common factors such as sleep deprivation, high stress, or dietary imbalances (Harvard Health Publishing, 2020). However, **when mood swings are intense, long-lasting, or affect daily life**, they may point to underlying mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, or depression (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022).

Causes of Mood Swings

Understanding what causes mood swings is essential for managing them properly. A variety of biological, psychological, and lifestyle-related factors may play a role:

1. Hormonal Changes

Hormonal fluctuations can significantly affect emotions. This is especially true during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, or menopause. Conditions such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) are closely linked to hormonal shifts and affect around 3 to 8 percent of menstruating women (Yonkers et al., 2008).

2. Mental Health Conditions

Mood swings are often associated with mood and personality disorders. In bipolar disorder, people experience alternating episodes of depression and mania. In borderline personality disorder, emotional instability often arises from intense relationships or perceived rejection (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

3. Substance Use

Drugs, alcohol, and even caffeine can influence emotional regulation. Regular substance use or withdrawal can change brain chemistry, leading to mood instability (Volkow et al., 2016).



How Mood Swings Affect Life

Frequent or unmanaged mood swings can **impact relationships, work, school, and overall quality of life**. They may lead to misunderstandings, arguments, or social withdrawal. Individuals experiencing mood swings may also feel frustrated, isolated, or out of control.

For others, supporting someone who has mood swings can be **emotionally draining**. Misinterpretation of behavior and emotional distance may create additional tension in relationships.

Managing Mood Swings

Although mood swings can feel overwhelming, there are proven ways to manage them and improve emotional stability.

1. Track Your Moods

Using a mood journal or mobile app can help identify patterns, triggers, and emotional cycles. Apps like MoodKit or Daylio provide tools for daily check-ins, mood tracking, and activity monitoring (Torous et al., 2018).

2. Build a Routine

Consistency in sleep, meals, and physical activity can help regulate the body and mind. The American Psychological Association recommends 7 to 9 hours of sleep and regular physical activity for improved emotional health.

3. Practice Mindfulness and Therapy

Mindfulness meditation and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can reduce emotional reactivity. A meta-analysis showed that CBT is effective in treating emotional dysregulation in people with mood disorders (Cuijpers et al., 2013).

4. Limit Substances

Cutting back on caffeine, alcohol, and recreational drugs can improve emotional balance. For those dependent on substances, gradual reduction with professional support is recommended.

5. Seek Professional Help

When mood swings affect daily life, seeking help from a mental health professional is important. Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is especially effective for individuals with intense emotional reactions or personality disorders (Linehan et al., 1999).



Supporting Others Through Mood Swings

If someone close to you struggles with mood swings, **patience, compassion, and clear communication can make a significant difference.** Encouraging them to seek help, setting healthy boundaries, and remaining supportive without encouraging unhealthy behavior are all key steps to maintaining a healthy relationship.

Conclusion

Mood swings are **a normal part of life**, but they should not be ignored if they begin to interfere with everyday tasks. **With awareness, routine, and professional support**, it is possible to manage emotional shifts in healthy and constructive ways. Whether for yourself or someone you care about, **understanding and responding to mood swings with knowledge and care** can lead to improved mental well-being and stronger relationships.

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Project EDSA (Eating Disorder Support & Awareness) is a youth-led initiative dedicated to uplifting lived experiences, sharing honest recovery stories, and making support more accessible.

Through our Voices of Recovery project and student-written resource guides, we aim to amplify youth voices and offer the kind of supportive community we wish we had during our own recovery.

This resource is a part of Project EDSA's Resource Library.

This is a growing collection of research-backed, student-created guides, tools, and support links designed to support mental health and eating disorder recovery. If there's a topic you'd like us to cover or if you're interested in creating a resource yourself, please feel free to let us know!

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