

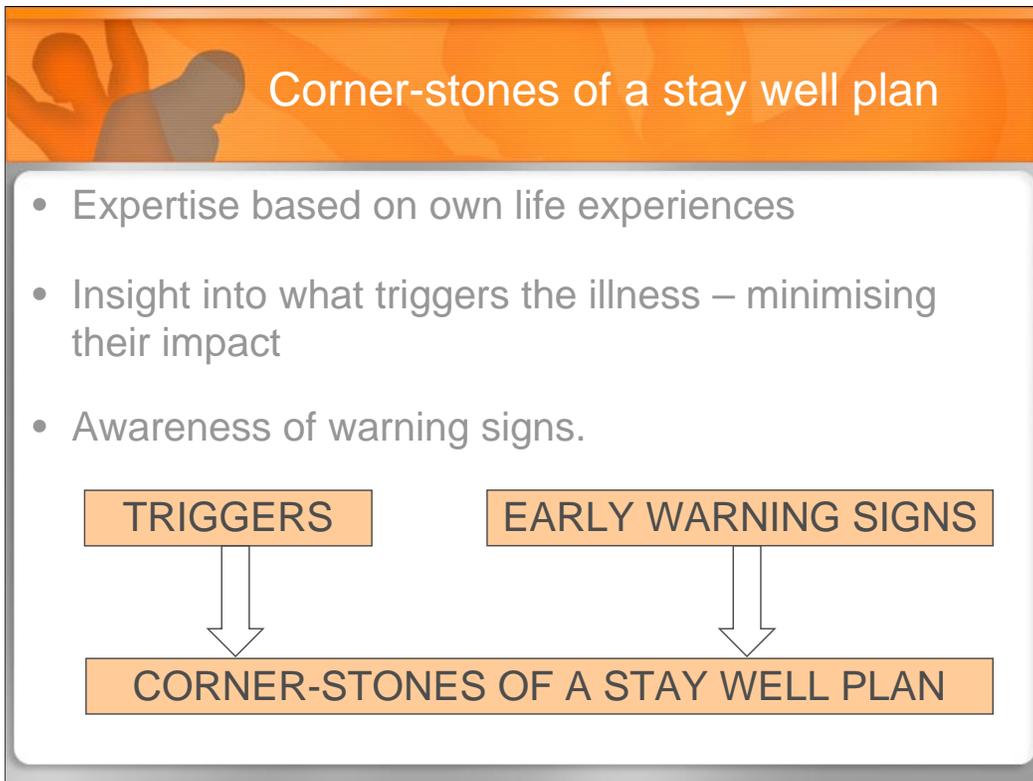
Staying Well with a Stay Well Plan

- Stay well plans help to manage and prevent episodes of illness
- No 'one fix fixes all' approach
- Learning is often through trial and error.



This presentation discusses how people can develop stay well plans to manage Bipolar Disorder and prevent episodes of illness.

Although there is no “one-fix-fixes-all”, people living with Bipolar Disorder learn – mostly through trial and error – what works for them, and what does not work.



Like others with chronic conditions, people with Bipolar Disorder can develop stay well plans to help them manage their condition.

Many people gain expertise in managing Bipolar Disorder from their own life experiences, including experiences of illness.

People learn what types of things may trigger an episode of illness, and how to avoid these triggers. Although it is not always possible to avoid triggers, it is possible to develop strategies to minimise the impact of particular triggers.

It is also possible to learn to recognise early signs of things going wrong. Triggers and early warning signs are the corner-stones of a stay well plan.



Elements of a stay well plan

- Adequate amounts of sleep
- Manageable levels of stress (at both work and play)
- Lifestyle (exercise, diet)
- Suitable medication and other therapies
- Suitable workplaces and local communities
- Social support networks
- Reliable and trustworthy professional support.

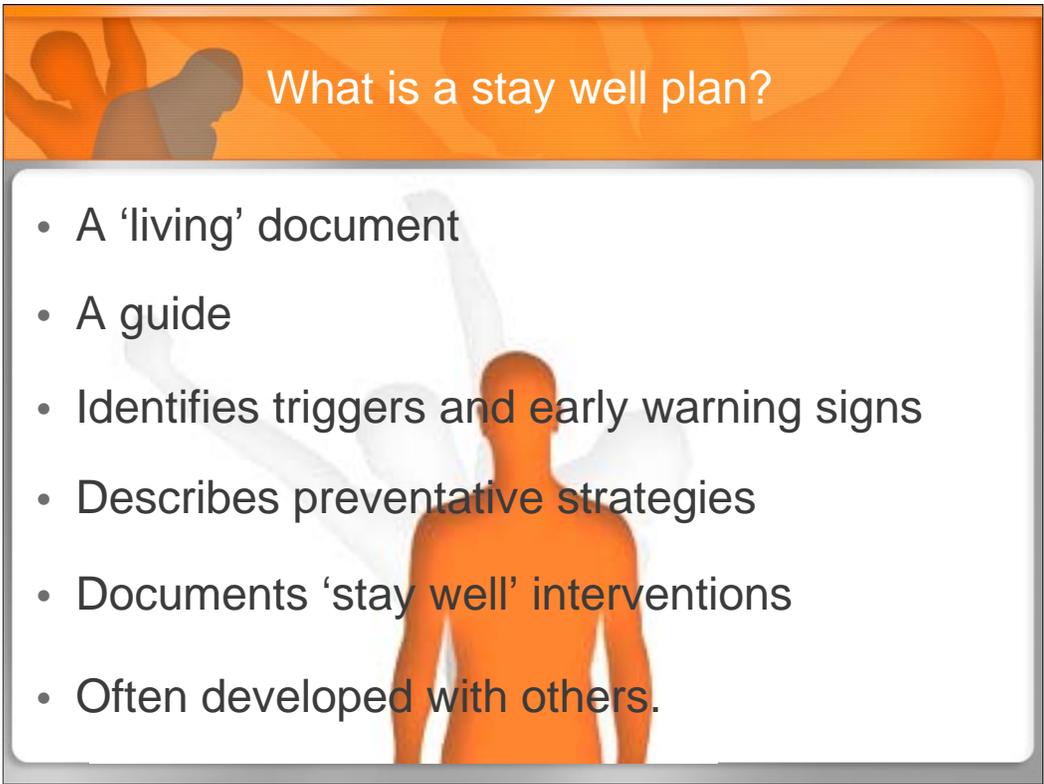
As discussed in a previous presentation by Margo Orum, sleep, managing stress and lifestyle factors are crucial ingredients in staying well. However, stay well plans need to acknowledge that there are times when these activities are much easier said than done. For example, when feeling down, it may be difficult to exercise. A stay well plan which includes cycling to work or a daily dog walk with a neighbour can be extremely helpful. Although staying well is rarely just about taking prescribed medication, medication is an important component of many stay well plans. However, many people also choose to include complementary therapies in their stay well plan.

Even in supportive workplaces, stress at work can make people with Bipolar Disorder vulnerable to an episode of illness. Developing personal strategies to manage workloads, and work harmoniously with colleagues, help people to stay well at work.

People with Bipolar Disorder often benefit from joining local community groups - sport clubs, community choirs, book clubs, churches etc. At my local tennis club, for example, people have always been much more concerned about my forehand drive than any medical diagnosis.

Partners, lovers, parents, children, brothers, sisters, friends and colleagues gain insight into Bipolar Disorder. I call this 'outside insight'. 'Outside insight' often helps people with Bipolar Disorder to manage their illness.

People with Bipolar Disorder often work with a number of different health care professionals, GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc., acknowledging that each professional has different expertise.



What is a stay well plan?

- A 'living' document
- A guide
- Identifies triggers and early warning signs
- Describes preventative strategies
- Documents 'stay well' interventions
- Often developed with others.

Stay well plans come in many different shapes and forms – they may be written, spoken, drawn or even sung. They are 'living' documents that are regularly updated. Rather than being 'set in stone', stay well plans are adapted and revised as an individual's personal circumstances require.

A stay well plan is a guide. The aim is to help people with Bipolar Disorder to clearly identify their own individual triggers and specific warning signs. Given that these triggers and warning signs may change with time, a stay well plan is flexible and responsive.

Stay well plans describe preventative strategies that help people to manage their illness during periods of wellness. These strategies are based on an individual's needs and social contexts. Stay well plans also include interventions that are appropriate for an individual to use when they feel early signs of things going wrong.

For many people, staying well is not a solitary activity. It is, therefore, worthwhile to develop stay well plans with partners, family, close friends, neighbours, work colleagues and health care professionals. Keeping others in the loop is also useful if interventions ever need to be implemented.

A stay well plan in action

- Rob's main triggers:
 - Jet lag
 - Increased work demands
 - Change of seasons.



This last slide provides an example of how Rob developed his personal stay well plan. Rob is a 40 year old merchant banker. His job requires frequent overseas travel between offices in London, New York and Melbourne. His first episode of mania occurred soon after flying home from New York. After this, Rob developed a stay well plan to avoid 'jet lag mania'. His stay well plan outlines seven specific strategies for when he is travelling overseas. These strategies include travelling with sleeping tablets and antipsychotic medication, just in case. Later, Rob also experienced an episode of mania during a very busy work period. He therefore added new strategies to his stay well plan for those times when his workload increases and he needs to work back late at night. Several of these strategies include assistance in 'mood checking' from his wife and colleagues. Finally, Rob recognised that he often becomes depressed during Spring. So he added strategies in his stay well plan to cope with the change of seasons, including taking his annual leave in September.

Conclusion

Different types of stay well plans for different life situations



Use your own life experiences and current circumstances to create a unique stay well plan.

These examples illustrate different types of stay well plans in various life situations. They demonstrate how people use their own life experiences and current circumstances to develop unique stay well plans. From these examples, others with Bipolar Disorder will be able to create their own individual stay well plan.