

FITNESS & WELL-BEING



Sadie Kaye, a Hong Kong-based TV and radio performer, suffers bipolar disorder and is founder of Bipolar Hong Kong and Mental Ideas. Photo: Antony Dickson

How to live with bipolar disorder

Medical experts and people suffering from the condition share how to regulate and embrace the emotional ups and downs, from terrible depression to manic euphoria

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When you think about depression, you imagine a sufferer's mental state goes in one direction: down. They are unipolar. In the condition once known as manic depression, a patient swings between high and low, up and down, between two poles: bipolar. The treatment for this strives to find a balance, a steadying of that pendulum, a finger to still it. Teresa Chan, clinical adviser at Mind Hong Kong, gives the text-book definition of bipolar versus unipolar depression: unipolar depression symptoms include lethargy and loss of interest. Bipolar comes with an additional set of symptoms – mania – which pose as opposites to the low mood and apathy of depression as we know it. People with bipolar disorder present with confidence, euphoria, racing thoughts and restlessness.

You have to accept it, make peace with it, but not let it define you

SADIE KAYE, TELEVISION AND RADIO PERFORMER

Sadie Kaye, a Hong Kong-based television and radio performer who lives with bipolar disorder and founded Bipolar Hong Kong and Mental Ideas, describes what the condition feels like to her. "Mania is like your first sugar rush or line of cocaine," she says. "The effects can last weeks, months, even years. During this time, our factory default setting is bold, impassioned, inspired, intuitive, seductive, magnetically charming and charismatic. We have no fear of failure." At first it sounds almost attractive – to be ignited by such energy, inflamed with a can-do spirit. But as Kaye warns, there are huge downsides: "Life is generally about a degree of predictability, so if your mood suddenly goes up or down, for no apparent reason, it's very hard for you and it's very hard for those close to you. As mania builds, imagination and reality can easily blur. We might hallucinate or experience delusions: typically of grandeur." People with bipolar can disconnect from their lives, become unhinged in a way that those who battle with unipolar depression



Kay Redfield Jamison; Frank Sinatra; and Teresa Chan. Photos: Johns Hopkins, Getty Images, May Tse



do not; they are grounded by their illness, mired by its deadweight. Kaye was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2011 after a battle with Graves disease – an autoimmune condition that causes the thyroid gland to become overactive, and triggers meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain. This health scare exacerbated her previously mild and undetected bipolar symptoms. "Immediately before my diagnosis, I experienced a self-destructive 'mixed episode' (acute mania and depression simultaneously), in which I nearly succeeded in taking my own life, and had to be treated at a psychiatric hospital in the UK," Kaye says. Chan says bipolar disorder is especially difficult to diagnose, because of the similarities and overlap in symptoms in the "low mood" phase. Anyone who suspects they may have symptoms of bipolar disorder, she says, should first see a family doctor and press for a referral to a psychiatrist. "You

can normally only be diagnosed with bipolar by a mental health professional," she says. It may be difficult to diagnose, but it is more common than one might think. According to the World Health Organization, it affects 45 million people worldwide. Mariah Carey, Demi Lovato, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Russell Brand, Sting, Stranger Things actor David Harbour, American astronaut Buzz Aldrin, Catherine Zeta Jones and Frank Sinatra were all diagnosed with this disorder. Sinatra summed up his experience in this way: "Being an 18-carat manic-depressive and having lived a life of violent emotional contradictions, I have an over-acute capacity for sadness as well as elation." How do you treat so mercurial a condition? Chan says it takes a combination of talking treatment and medication. The medications used to treat bipolar have not changed much, Kaye says. "Everything is lithium-based and lithium has been around since the beginning of time." Lithium is an element that takes its name from the Greek "lithos", or rock. It's the lightest solid element and is highly reactive and flammable. Australian psychiatrist John Cade is credited with popularising its use in the treatment of mania in 1949 as a mood stabiliser. This drug helps reduce the severity and frequency of mania, and can relieve or ward off depression. Studies show it can reduce suicide risk. Kaye, who can be heard presenting "Sharp Pains" on RTHK Radio 3's 123 Show learned that having therapy and taking meds was the bare minimum she could do. She began to dissect her condition "with the enthusiasm of an amateur sleuth", and adopted healthy lifestyle choices with creative outlets. Creativity "assists recovery" in many ways – to help channel energy, rebuild esteem and make sense of emotions. The combination allows her to feel the benefits of her medications and

therapy for longer and reduce the amount of medication needed to keep her well. Recovery, she believes, is enhanced by a holistic approach – healthy lifestyle choices, rigorous self-monitoring of mood swings and what triggers them, and including family and friends in your treatment plan. It is important not just to rely on experts' advice, but to take a proactive and creative approach to your own treatment rather than being a passive victim. This is why Kaye has recast her mental illness as positive. "Mental illness is portrayed in the media as a burden. The focus is on suffering. But I think if you measure your life by your suffering it leads you to a dangerous place." She avoids the term "sufferer" and replaces it with "artist". She is more than her bipolar condition, she says: you have to "accept it, make peace with it, but not let it define you". I have an over-acute capacity for sadness as well as elation FRANK SINATRA Kay Redfield Jamison, professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins in the United States, was already clinically trained when she was first diagnosed with bipolar. She would agree with Kaye. She has described herself as an "exuberant" person who longs for peace and tranquillity, but in the end prefers "tumultuousness coupled to iron discipline" to a "stunningly boring life". In her subsequent bestselling memoir, An Unquiet Mind, Redfield Jamison writes: "I long ago abandoned the notion of a life without storms. It is, at the end of the day, the individual moments of restlessness, of bleakness, of strong persuasions and mad-dened enthusiasms, that inform one's life, change the nature and direction of one's work, and give final meaning and colour to one's loves and friendships." Kaye agrees. "Every documentary [her 30-minute television film The Bipolar Express was highly commended by the Association for International Broadcasting], every podcast I produce is aimed at positively and proactively influencing the way mental health is perceived by those who have it, and those who are affected by it. I want to make a difference to people's lives in creative and practical ways, because I believe mental illness can either be your prison – or it can set you free."

Vegan delights for a cruelty-free festive season

Restaurants and food retailers are creating plant-based treats to ring in the Year of the Ox

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Lunar New Year is a time to indulge in family feasts and festive treats. Even those complying with social-distancing restrictions want to maintain the traditions of sharing special dishes. The pandemic has made people more conscious of the need to eat healthily, and restaurants and food retailers have created treats for those leaning towards a plant-based, diet – with no animal products such as meat, fish, eggs, milk or butter. Here is a sampling of vegan treats to ring in the Year of the Ox.

- 1. Sprouted nuts, seeds and dried fruit FoodCraft, an online organic food store with a factory in Kennedy Town, has several Spring Festival offerings. Chief among them is a Lunar New Year candy box with raw sprouted and dried fruits (HK\$1,288) including macadamia nuts, almonds, pistachios, walnuts, cashews, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, organic banana chips and organic dried Greek figs. A smaller version costs HK\$638. Foodcraft spokesman Shima Shimizu says nuts and seeds contain many proteins, healthy fats, fibre, and important minerals such as zinc and magnesium. "However, they also have a chemical known as phytic acid and some enzyme inhibitors which can interfere with the body's absorption of certain minerals such as iron, calcium, manganese, and zinc," she says. "To remove such enzyme inhibitors and phytic acid, we soak the nuts and seeds for one to 12 hours in water until they sprout, as you do before planting seeds. The length of time varies according to the type of nuts and seeds." After sprouting, the nuts and seeds are dehydrated for 24 hours at low temperature, to make them easier to digest and to enhance the flavour.
- 2. Sweet and savoury confections The Cakery, a bakery with four outlets, offers a Lunar New Year vegan biscuit and chocolate gift box (HK\$598) that includes red dates from Xinjiang, 18 biscuits made from oolong tea leaves from Taiwan, 12 ginger biscuits and 20 sugar-free mendiants, traditional French plain chocolate discs studded with coconut flakes and goji berries. It has also launched a refined-sugar-free vegan traditional Chinese pudding trio (HK\$398) with a red sugar rice cake, red date cake, and savoury turnip cake made with white radish, dried mushroom, preserved pickles, black fungus, and black truffle.
- 3. Cruelty-free pastries Pure Vegan, based in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, recently launched vegan Chinese pastries for those who love these delicacies – and who love animals. A gift box of 16 Pure Vegan Chinese pastries in three flavours – brown sugar, pineapple and rose – costs 168 yuan (HK\$201). The brown sugar cake, made of Xinjiang red dates, Ningxia goji berries and black sesame, has a compelling story. Company co-founder Ran Lau says it is a cruelty-free substitute for donkey-hide gelatin (or "ejiao") pastry, popular with mainland women who see it as a tonic for skin whitening and for replenishing their blood. "Donkey-skin cake is made with much animal cruelty. Donkey keepers flay the animal [before its slaughter] so its skin is infused with blood," Lau says. "Our brown sugar cake comes with the same black-gelatin texture. Red dates, gogi berries and black sesame have blood-replenishing and skin-detoxifying properties." She adds that the brown sugar from Guangxi is distilled from cane sugar. "The brown sugar on sale in [mainland] China is often adulterated with impurities. Our brown sugar is specially processed to remove them." Lau says even though the cakes have no added preservatives, they can be kept at room temperature for 45 days.
- 4. Traditional festive cakes Hong Kong-based Green Common, a retail grocery chain which promotes plant-based eating, has developed three vegan Lunar New Year cakes: pumpkin rice cake with red quinoa, turmeric and oatmilk (HK\$248); peach gum water chestnut cake with chrysanthemum bud (HK\$218); and OmniPork vegan XO sauce red quinoa turnip cake (HK\$248). David Yeung, the chain's founder, says all flavours are made with plant-based ingredients and superfoods. "They are cruelty-free and Buddhist-friendly [without onion or garlic], and free from cholesterol, artificial colouring and MSG," he notes. While coconut milk is commonly used in traditional festive cakes to enhance their flavour, Yeung says the pumpkin rice cake is made with oat milk, instead. For the OmniPork vegan XO sauce cake, Yeung says zero-cholesterol plant-based meat OmniPork replaces the unhealthy Chinese traditional cured meat, for all the flavour without the risks from processed meat preservatives. "The vegan XO sauce is made with shiitake mushroom, lion's mane mushroom, chilli and other natural spices."
- 5. Festive casserole Pure Veggie House, a popular vegan restaurant recently relocated to Central, has created an 18-ingredient poon choi, a traditional layered casserole dish made for communal sharing. This meat-free version includes mushrooms, yam, lotus root, yellow fungus, elm fungus, bamboo fungus, turnip, broccoli, and bean curd sheets. A bowl to serve seven to eight people costs HK\$788; one for three to four people costs HK\$388. Manager Jacky Chow says there are four types of Chinese traditional cakes for takeaway, also: red date, taro, coconut sauce, and turnip and mushroom, at HK\$108 each.



Pure Vegan's pastries in brown sugar, pineapple and rose.



The Cakery's vegan biscuit and chocolate gift box. Photos: Handouts