

What to Expect When You're Tapering: 11 Things That Helped Me Heal

At one point or another in the 25 years of my Bipolar II NOS diagnosis, I was on 14 different medications and preparations. Once my final therapist realized my diagnosis was incorrect, I was determined to taper off of the last of them. Six years into the process, here's what I've learned.

1. Expect it to take LONGER than you think. Even if you hit your med target in months, it may take years to re-build.
2. **Don't expect to bounce back to the person you were on medication...or before you went on it.** Instead, work on learning to like emerging parts of yourself that may initially feel unfamiliar, difficult, or unacceptable.
3. Don't panic, and get help with emotional and physical ups and downs as your system learns to re-balance.
4. Go slowly and lean on your support team. Don't trust impulses to handle it yourself, go "cold turkey," or push through by sheer willpower. Taper gradually. Work through what comes up. Don't rush or medicate with alcohol or other substances (It took me six years to be ready for caffeine.)
5. Document what makes you feel good (and not). Journaling, drawing, collage, or dictated notes can help you and your support team process what's happening and **find ways for you to do more of what makes life better!**
6. Expect EVERYTHING to change (job, relationships, hobbies, habits, location, faith, favorite foods, music, health). You might struggle with basic skills like going to the supermarket or paying bills and need new habits or accommodations. Don't criticize yourself or insist that anything is off limits for transformation or upgrade.
7. **If you have any spiritual connection or beliefs, leverage that now!** Training, mentorship, prayer, community, ceremonies or rituals, altars, or divination can provide essential stability, encouragement, and guidance.
8. *Prepare people you care about to expect big changes in your habits, beliefs, and personality.* They may have concerns or even misconceptions, so don't take it personally if they're skeptical or ask lots of questions. Warn them about potential difficulties and give extra reassurance and communication about your plan.
9. *Help others adjust to supporting the new you.* As confused or uncertain as you might be on the inside, they are even more clueless from the outside, but they may hesitate to ask. Be liberal with explanations (and reminders) of what is going on with you and what you need. Be gentle but firm if they slip into old, unhelpful habits.
10. **Look out for surfacing beliefs, mindsets, or traumas that need healing.** Don't lose faith in your determination to taper. But do pause and get extra help when you need it (because you will). In the long term, this growth is THE KEY to better health and function!
11. *ENJOY the things you like BETTER about yourself off medication.* Medication is not "the good old days" just because it was easier. New knowledge and habits make these **the good new days of discovering and learning to love your authentic strengths and challenges.**

NOTES:

A nomadic, spiritual artist mending her life one sock (and one city) at a time, Robin Pool shares her insights on Substack ["How We Connect With Our Environment"](#) and art on Instagram and YouTube [@robinfpoolfiberart](#). © Robin F. Pool 2025