



BIPOLAR DISORDER

Let's talk about it

Do you have periods of time when you feel unusually “up” (happy and outgoing, or irritable), but other periods when you feel “down” (unusually sad or anxious)? During the “up” periods, do you have increased energy or activity and feel a decreased need for sleep, while during the “down” times you have low energy, hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal thoughts? Do these symptoms of fluctuating mood and energy levels cause you distress or affect your daily functioning? Some people with these symptoms have a lifelong but treatable mental illness called bipolar disorder.

What is Bipolar?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that can be chronic (persistent or constantly reoccurring) or episodic (occurring occasionally and at irregular intervals). People sometimes refer to bipolar disorder with the older terms “manic-depressive disorder” or “manic depression.”

Everyone experiences normal ups and downs, but with bipolar disorder, the range of mood changes can be extreme. People with the disorder have manic episodes, or unusually elevated moods in which the individual might feel very happy, irritable, or “up,” with a marked increase in activity level. They might also have depressive episodes, in which they feel sad, indifferent, or hopeless, combined with a very low activity level. Some people have hypomanic episodes, which are like manic episodes, but not severe enough to cause marked impairment in social or occupational functioning or require hospitalization.

Most of the time, bipolar disorder symptoms start during late adolescence or early adulthood. Occasionally, children may experience bipolar disorder symptoms. Although symptoms may come and go, bipolar disorder usually requires lifelong treatment and does not go away on its own. Bipolar disorder can be an important factor in suicide, job loss, ability to function, and family discord. However, proper treatment can lead to better functioning and improved quality of life.

Types of Bipolar

People are diagnosed with three basic types of bipolar disorder that involve clear changes in mood, energy, and activity levels. These moods range from manic episodes to depressive episodes. The 3 types are Bipolar I disorder, Bipolar II disorder, and Cyclothymic disorder.

Signs & Symptoms

People experiencing a manic episode:

- Feeling very up, high, elated, or extremely irritable or touchy
- Feeling jumpy or wired, more active than usual
- Racing thoughts
- Decreased need for sleep
- Talking fast about a lot of different things (“flight of ideas”)
- Excessive appetite for food, drinking, sex, or other pleasurable activities
- Feeling able to do many things at once without getting tired
- Feeling unusually important, talented, or powerful

People experiencing a depressive episode:

- Feeling very down or sad, or anxious
- Feeling slowed down or restless
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Trouble falling asleep, waking up too early, or sleeping too much
- Talking very slowly, feeling unable to find anything to say, or forgetting a lot
- Lack of interest in almost all activities
- Unable to do even simple things
- Feeling hopeless or worthless, or thinking about death or suicide

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Source: National Institute of Mental Health



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Bipolar I Disorder

Bipolar I Disorder is defined by manic episodes that last at least 7 days (most of the day, nearly every day) or when manic symptoms are so severe that hospital care is needed. Usually, separate depressive episodes occur as well, typically lasting at least 2 weeks. Episodes of mood disturbance with mixed features are also possible. The experience of four or more episodes of mania or depression within a year is termed “rapid cycling.”

Bipolar II Disorder

Bipolar II Disorder is defined by a pattern of depressive and hypomanic episodes, but the episodes are less severe than the manic episodes in bipolar I disorder.

Cyclothymic Disorder

Cyclothymic disorder (also called cyclothymia) is defined by recurrent hypomanic and depressive symptoms that are not intense enough or do not last long enough to qualify as hypomanic or depressive episodes.

“Other specified and unspecified bipolar and related disorders” is a diagnosis that refers to bipolar disorder symptoms that do not match the three major types of bipolar disorder outlined above.

How is Bipolar disorder treated?

Treatment helps many people, even those with the most severe forms of bipolar disorder. Mental health professionals treat bipolar disorder with medications, psychotherapy, or a combination of treatments.

How is Bipolar disorder diagnosed?

To diagnose bipolar disorder, a health care provider may complete a physical exam, order medical testing to rule out other illnesses, and refer the person for an evaluation by a mental health professional. Bipolar disorder is diagnosed based on the severity, length, and frequency of an individual’s symptoms and experiences over their lifetime.

Some people have bipolar disorder for years before it’s diagnosed for several reasons. People with bipolar II disorder may seek help only for depressive episodes and hypomanic episodes may go unnoticed. Misdiagnosis may happen because some bipolar disorder symptoms are like those of other illnesses. For example, people with bipolar disorder who also have psychotic symptoms can be misdiagnosed with schizophrenia. Some health conditions, such as thyroid disease, can cause symptoms like those of bipolar disorder. The effects of recreational and illicit drugs can sometimes mimic or worsen mood symptoms.

Many people with bipolar disorder also have other mental disorders or conditions such as anxiety disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), misuse of drugs or alcohol, or eating disorders. Sometimes people who have severe manic or depressive episodes also have symptoms of psychosis, such as hallucinations or delusions. The psychotic symptoms tend to match the person’s extreme mood. For example, someone having psychotic symptoms during a depressive episode may falsely believe they are financially ruined, while someone having psychotic symptoms during a manic episode may falsely believe they are famous or have special powers.

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