



Does Your 1 in 4 Have Bipolar Disorder?



Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is an illness involving one or more episodes of serious mania and depression. The illness causes a person's mood to swing from excessively "high" and/or irritable to sad and hopeless, with periods of a normal mood in between.

Bipolar disorder typically begins in adolescence or early adulthood and continues throughout life. It is often not recognized as an illness and people who have it may suffer needlessly for years. Bipolar disorder can be extremely distressing and disruptive for those who have this disease, their spouses, family members, friends and employers. Although there is no known cure, bipolar disorder is treatable, and recovery is possible. Individuals with bipolar disorder have successful relationships and meaningful jobs. The combination of medications and psychotherapy helps the vast majority of people return to productive, fulfilling lives.

What causes bipolar disorder?

Although a specific genetic link to bipolar disorder has not been found, studies show that children with a parent or sibling diagnosed with bipolar disorder are four to six times more likely to develop the illness. It is also possible that people may inherit a tendency to develop the illness, which can then be triggered by environmental factors such as distressing life events.

The presence of bipolar disorder indicates a biochemical imbalance which alters a person's moods. This imbalance is thought to be caused by irregular hormone production or to a problem with certain chemicals in the brain, called neurotransmitters, which act as messengers to our nerve cells.

What are the symptoms of bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is often difficult to recognize and diagnose. It causes a person to have a high level of energy, unrealistically expansive thoughts or ideas, and impulsive or reckless behavior; these intense emotional states are also referred to as "mood episodes." These symptoms may feel good to a person, which may lead to denial that there is a problem.

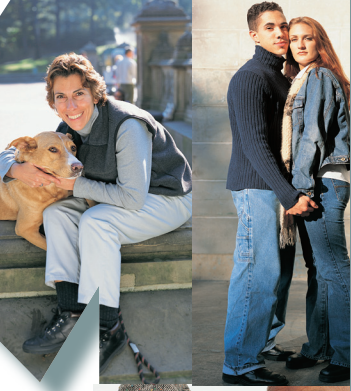
Another reason bipolar disorder is difficult to diagnose is that its symptoms may appear to be part of another illness or attributed to other problems such as substance abuse, poor school performance, or trouble in the workplace.

Symptoms of Mania or Manic Episode (which can last up to three months if untreated):

- Excessive energy, activity, restlessness, racing thoughts and rapid talking.
- Denial that anything is wrong.
- Extreme "high" or euphoric feelings—a person may feel "on top of the world."
- Easily irritated or distracted.
- Decreased need for sleep.
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's ability and powers—a person may experience feelings of exaggerated confidence or unwarranted optimism.
- Uncharacteristically poor judgment.
- Sustained period of behavior that is different from usual.
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol or sleeping medications.
- Provocative, intrusive, or aggressive behavior—a person may become enraged or paranoid if his or her grand ideas are stopped or excessive social plans are refused.
- Behaving impulsively and taking part in a lot of pleasurable, high-risk behaviors, such as spending sprees, impulsive sex, and impulsive business investments.



do more for 1 in 4



Symptoms of Depression or Depressive Episode—Some people experience periods of normal mood and behavior following a manic phase, however, the depressive phase will eventually appear. Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood.
- Sleeping too much or too little, middle-of-the-night or early morning waking.
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex.
- Irritability or restlessness.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders).
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, including suicide attempts.

Treatment

Though there is no cure, treatment of bipolar disorder is critical for recovery. A combination of medication, professional help and support from family, friends and peers help individuals with bipolar disorder stabilize their emotions and behavior. It is suggested that those with bipolar disorder receive guidance, education and support from a mental health professional to help deal with personal relationships, maintain a healthy self-image and ensure compliance with his or her treatment.

Support and self-help groups are also an invaluable resource for learning coping skills, feeling acceptance and avoiding social isolation. Friends and family should join a support group to better understand the illness so that they can continue to offer encouragement and support to their loved ones.

Take These Steps to Get Help for Bipolar Disorder

1. **Call a doctor** if you suspect that you have bipolar disorder. Call your family doctor if you feel more comfortable starting with him or her. Explain your moods, how quickly they change and how often they occur. Your doctor can help you find someone experienced in treating bipolar disorder.
2. **Meet with a mental health professional.** Just as you would see a cardiologist if you found out you had a heart problem, you need to see someone who specializes in mental health for bipolar disorder.
3. **Keep all appointments.** Some days you may not feel like going to the doctor or therapist, but it is important that you keep all of your appointments. Ask a friend to go along if you don't feel like going alone.
4. **Take your medicines the right way.** Take your medications faithfully (even if you're feeling fine). Make sure you follow the directions on the bottle and take all the doses. If you have any questions, contact your doctor.
5. **Take care of your health.** Get enough sleep; set regular times to go to bed and wake up. Irregular sleep may set off your mood swings. Take a walk or exercise every day. Eat healthy foods. Avoid using drugs or alcohol.
6. **Try to reduce stress** in your life as much as possible. Learn to manage the stressful things in your life. Also, learn to spot the signs of an upcoming mood change, so you can act on it quickly.

Other Resources

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

Phone Number: (312) 642-0049
Toll-Free Number: 800-826-3632
Website URL: www.dbsalliance.org

National Institute of Mental Health

Phone Number: (301) 443-4513
Toll Free Number: 866-615-6464
Website URL: www.nimh.nih.gov

International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression (iFred)

Phone: 800-239-1265
Website URL: <http://www.ifred.org/>