

Bipolar Disorder

Everyone has ups and downs and, at times, we may all think we are bipolar. However, in bipolar disorder the peaks and valleys are severe. The symptoms can affect your work, relationships, and daily life. Although bipolar disorder is treatable, many people don't recognize the warning signs and get the help they need. Bipolar disorder generally worsens without treatment. It is important to recognize the signs and seek help if you think this might be part of your struggle.

Bipolar Disorder causes serious changes in mood, thinking, energy and behavior – from the highs of mania to the lows of depression. These cycles can last for days, weeks, even months. The changes are so intense that they interfere with your life.

During a manic phase, the person might impulsively spend money they don't have and can't pay back, take an expensive vacation, cheat on their partner, binge eat, gamble, pick fights, even quit a job impulsively. During a depressive episode, the same person may be so depressed that they can't get out of bed in the morning.

The causes of bipolar disorder are not yet understood. The first manic or depressive episode usually occurs during adolescence or early adulthood. With treatment, you can lead a rich and rewarding life.

There are frightening myths about bipolar disorder.

All people with bipolar disorder have severe mood swings: Most people have more depressive episodes than manic episodes. Additionally, the mania can be so mild that it is difficult to recognize – it can just be a time when you feel good – less depressed – than normal. Also, people with bipolar can go for long stretches of time without symptoms. The symptoms and mood swings aren't constant.

People with bipolar disorder can't get better: Most people with bipolar disorder can have successful careers, happy families, and good relationships. It can be challenging. With treatment and healthy coping skills, you can live a very fulfilling life.

Bipolar disorder only affects your mood: It can affect your energy, judgment, memory, appetite, sleep patterns, sex-drive, self-esteem, memory, and more. It has been linked to anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

There is nothing you can do but take medication: Medication is usually an important part of your treatment but there are also skills and techniques that can help you manage your mood swings and prevent further damage to your life and relationships. Your therapist can help you define triggers to manic and develop skills for decreasing the intensity and impact of the manic episode.

Mania and Hypomania Symptoms Include:

Hypomania is a less severe form of mania. People in hypomanic state may simply feel euphoric, energetic, or more productive than usual. The following symptoms of mania are also present in hypomania – just to a lesser degree.

Feeling “high” and optimistic OR irritable and angry – both or either can be present in a manic state
Unrealistic beliefs about self and abilities
Little need for sleep
Rapid speech

Rapid thoughts or jumping from one idea to the next
Highly distractable and unable to concentrate
Impulsiveness and impaired judgments
Behaving recklessly

In severe cases, there may be delusions and/or hallucinations.

Bipolar Depression:

Bipolar depression can manifest as quite similar to Unipolar Depression. However, there are often unique qualities to bipolar depression that may not be as common in Unipolar Depression. Bipolar depression is more likely to involve irritability, guilt, feelings of restlessness, psychomotor retardation, sleeping too much, and weight gain. They are also somewhat more likely to be “out of touch with reality” than those with Unipolar Depression.

Common symptoms of Bipolar Depression include:

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| Feeling hopeless, sad, or empty | Appetite and weight changes |
| Irritability | Sleep problems |
| Inability to experience pleasure | Concentration and memory problems |
| Fatigue | Feelings of worthlessness and guilt |
| Mental and/or physical sluggishness | Thoughts of death or suicide |

Mixed Episodes:

Individuals, in addition to clear mood swings, can have a Bipolar disorder characterized by mixed episodes. These episodes feature symptoms of both depression and mania at the same time. Common signs of mixed episodes include agitation, irritability, anxiety, insomnia, racing thoughts, distractibility.

The most effective treatment strategy usually involves a combination of medication, psychotherapy, lifestyle changes, and a strong support system.