

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar Disorder is a mood disorder. A person with Bipolar Disorder has extreme "highs" and "lows" in mood. It is different from the normal ups and downs that everybody goes through. Severe types of this illness can cause problems at home, work, school or social life...it may even result in suicide.

What causes Bipolar Disorder?

There is no one reason why someone develops Bipolar Disorder. Family history and brain chemistry play a big role in producing the illness. One's personality and stress can bring on the illness.

Signs and Symptoms

A person with Bipolar disorder has extreme changes in mood, such as overly "high" (Mania) and overly "low" (Depression). Some people have periods of normal mood in between. Periods of Mania may last several days to months. Periods of Depression may last several weeks to months. These symptoms are a change from the person's normal Behavior.

Symptoms of Mania may include:

- Very good mood
- Increased energy and restlessness
- Too many ideas too fast
- Talking more than usual or very quickly
- Less need for sleep, without feeling tired
- Poor judgment and acting without thinking.
For example, spending a lot of money, careless driving, increased use of alcohol or drugs, getting into fights, foolish financial decisions, etc.

- Increased sex drive
- Unable to focus
- Exaggerated beliefs in one's abilities. For example, believing he/she is god or has special powers (such as being able to fly), thinking he/she is smarter than others, etc.
- Feeling "on top of the world"

Symptoms of Depression may include:

- Feeling sad - crying for no obvious reason
- Feeling hopeless and empty
- Feelings of guilty or worthless
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Low energy or feeling tired
- Difficulty thinking or remembering things
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating less or more than usual
- Thoughts of suicide

What are the treatments?

Bipolar disorder responds well to treatment once the illness has been diagnosed. Since the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder will keep coming back, ongoing treatment is needed. A combination of medication and psychosocial treatment (such as stress management) is best for managing the illness over time. Sometimes changes to the treatment plan may be needed to manage the illness effectively. For example, the psychiatrist may change the type or dose of medication. Support from family, friends and self-help groups can also be very helpful.