

Another Look at . . .

Bipolar Disorder

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Bipolar Disorder, sometimes called manic-depression, is characterized by uncontrollable mood swings often so intense that they disrupt the person's ability to function in relationships, jobs, school, and daily living. During the manic phase, many people say they feel exceptionally energetic, intelligent, or witty so "high" they are almost super-human. This euphoric mood can quickly increase to an uncontrollable state in which the individual is not making rational judgments. Following the manic phase, the person may sink into a depression that is much more than "the blues." The depressive state can be a bleak and hopeless mood that lasts for two weeks or more (see box below.)

A manic episode is diagnosed if elevated mood occurs *with three or more* of the other symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for 1 week or longer. If the mood is irritable (as in many adolescents with bipolar disorder), *four additional symptoms* must be present.

A depressive episode is diagnosed if five or more of these symptoms last most of the day, nearly every day, for a period of two weeks or longer. (See box below.)



If you recognize yourself or someone you love in the symptoms listed below, try to avoid the urge to diagnose it yourself. It is important to be evaluated by a trained mental health professional so that appropriate diagnosis and treatment can be started as soon as possible.

Can Children or Teens have Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder typically develops in early adulthood, but more children and early adolescents are being diagnosed. Because symptoms may appear different in youth, it can be more difficult to diagnose Bipolar Disorder in children and adolescents. Bipolar disorder can mimic other youth disorders with similar symptoms.

Help is available

A diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder can be a relief after a long struggle with this confusing condition. Bipolar Disorder is not a behavioral choice or a character flaw. It is an illness that is generally treatable with medication and therapy. People with Bipolar Disorder need

careful treatment by well-trained professionals.



Treatment often includes one or more medications. A psychiatrist or medical doctor must prescribe these

medications and see the patient regularly to check for effectiveness and side effects. In addition, a psychologist or other counselor usually provides talk therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and other opportunities to work out the best way to live with the disorder. The counselor and patient look for ways to reduce stress, which may include a support group. Occasionally the patient must be hospitalized until his or her mood is stabilized.

For families and other loved ones

Therapy may also involve the whole family. It is important for spouses, partners, and children of the patient to understand the disorder and the behaviors that may be involved. A competent therapist can help everyone adjust and live more easily with the disorder.

Sometimes a person with Bipolar Disorder doesn't realize that he or she needs help. If possible, sit with that person in a calm moment. State what

you've observed and what concerns you. Try using "I" statements, for example, "When I see you acting in such-and-such a way, it worries me. I think a medical professional can give us help." Providing information, giving a ride to the first appointment, and offering your unconditional love are important, and ultimately it is the patient who must make the choice to seek treatment.

Summary

It is possible to live a full and healthy life with Bipolar Disorder. However, it is important to follow these guidelines:

- **Getting good information is a must.**
- **Proper diagnosis and care is essential.**
- **Support groups may provide an outlet for stress.**

Mental health providers can help you and your loved ones learn to live with Bipolar Disorder. For more information contact Far West Family services, your EAP provider.



This information is provided for educational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional care for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition.

Symptoms of mania include:

- Increased energy, activity, and restlessness
- Excessively "high," overly good, euphoric mood
- Extreme irritability, aggressive behavior
- Racing thoughts, racing speech
- Impulsiveness, poor judgment
- Little sleep needed
- Unrealistic beliefs in one's abilities and powers
- Spending sprees
- Increased sexual drive
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol or sleeping medications
- Provocative, intrusive behavior
- Denial that anything is wrong

Symptoms of depression include:

- Lasting sad, anxious or empty mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, a feeling of fatigue or of being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Restlessness or irritability
- Sleeping too much or can't sleep
- Change in appetite and/or unintended weight loss or gain
- Chronic pain or other persistent bodily symptoms that are not caused by physical illness or injury
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

Source: National Institute of Mental Health