

Facts about BIPOLAR DISORDER

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder, often referred to as manic depressive disorder, is a common disorder that results from chemical imbalances in the brain. It affects more than three million Americans and is seen equally as often in men and in women.

Bipolar disorder often begins in adolescence or early adulthood and continues throughout life. The person may experience recurring episodes of mania and/or depression that can last for days or months. Between episodes, most people with bipolar disorder have periods of relatively normal moods and activity.

If left untreated, in its most severe form, bipolar disorder can result in an inability to function in one's usual roles and may lead to suicide.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of **mania** may include:

- an elated, happy, irritable or angry mood
- increased activity and energy
- more thoughts and faster thinking than usual
- increased talking and more rapid speech
- ambitious or grandiose plans
- poor judgment
- increased sexual interest and activity
- decreased sleep and need for sleep

Symptoms of the **depressive phase** of the illness may include:

- extreme sadness and/or apathy
- decreased energy and activity
- possibly restlessness and irritability
- slowed thoughts and speech
- less enjoyment of activities
- decreased sexual interest and activity
- feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt and helplessness
- changed appetite and sleep and suicidal feelings

Can bipolar disorder be treated?

Treatment with medication

Bipolar disorder is highly treatable and medications can alleviate symptoms and prevent a relapse. A variety of different types of medications that stabilize brain chemistry may be used to treat bipolar disorder. These include:

- mood stabilizers
- anti-depressants
- anti-psychotic drugs

Other methods of treatment

Medication alone will not eliminate all of the problems associated with bipolar disorder. Counseling, education and psychiatric rehabilitation play important roles in the process of recovery.

Counseling and education help the individual and family to understand and accept the illness. Counseling can also help to alleviate the negative impact of the illness on the person's self-esteem.

Psychiatric rehabilitation assists persons with bipolar disorder to learn new lifestyle strategies for coping with the illness. Individuals are encouraged to understand their own patterns of feeling and behavior; learn to handle stress; develop healthy lifestyle habits; create a support system; and set goals for accomplishing their hopes and dreams.

Consumer/self-help groups and family advocacy organizations play an important role in the process of recovering from bipolar disorder.

For more information, call:

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