

BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder, formerly referred to as manic-depressive illness, is a mental illness that causes extreme mood swings. It is characterized by episodes of mania and depression lasting from days to months and usually beginning in late adolescence, but can start in early childhood or as late as a person's 40s or 50s.

A manic state can be identified by feelings of extreme irritability and/or euphoria. During an episode of mania several other symptoms can occur at the same time, such as agitation, surges of energy, reduced need for sleep, talkativeness, pleasure seeking and increased risk-taking behavior.

The other state of depression produces feelings of extreme sadness, hopelessness and lack of energy.

Not everyone's symptoms are the same. The severity of mania and depression can vary. Bipolar disorder can cause mental suffering, problems with family, friends and co-workers, loss of job productivity, financial problems or death from reckless behavior or suicide.

Symptoms of mania can include:

- » Increased energy, activity and restlessness
- » Spending sprees
- » Increased sexual drive
- » Abuse of drugs, alcohol and sleeping medications
- » Distractibility
- » Provocative and intrusive behavior
- » Excessive irritability and aggressive behavior
- » Decreased need for sleep without experiencing fatigue
- » Grandiose delusions, inflated sense of self-importance
- » Increased talking and more rapid speech than normal
- » Racing thoughts, jumping quickly from one idea to another
- » Delusions and hallucinations
- » Impulsiveness, poor judgment and distractibility
- » Diminished capacity for pleasure or loss of interest in activities
- » Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, failure and lack of self-worth
- » Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- » Changes in eating, sleeping or other daily habits
- » Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- » Social withdrawal
- » Unexplained aches or pains
- » Increased feelings of worry or anxiety

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- » Thoughts of death or suicide attempts
- » Sleeping too much
- » Decreased energy, a feeling of fatigue

Symptoms of depression can include:

Treatment

While there is no cure for bipolar disorder, after accurate diagnosis, most people can be successfully treated. Medication is an essential part of treatment and may be prescribed in combination with psychotherapy. Therapy often helps an individual learn ways of coping with symptoms and new ways to relate to others. Family members may also benefit from counseling, learning skills to help understand and cope with their loved one's illness.