

MANAGING YOUR BIPOLAR DISORDER

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a psychiatric condition that was known before as manic depressive disorder. The main symptom involves swings between moods of mania (or hyperactivity) and depression.

It usually occurs by 30 years of age, in both men and women. The disorder seems to run in some families. It affects as many as 10 million individuals in the United States.

What Causes Bipolar Disorder?

The cause is unknown. Stress, drug or alcohol abuse, and use of some prescription drugs may increase the risk.

What Are the Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder?

People in the manic mood feel full of energy and happy. They need less sleep. Speech and thoughts race. Self-esteem is high. Overeating is common. People can have poor judgment and make reckless choices. Manic people can also hear voices or see things that aren't there. Some people do things like clean the house to burn energy.

In a depressed mood, people have less energy, feel sad and cry for no reason, sleep too much or have trouble falling asleep, lose pleasure in life, eat less, and struggle with feelings of worthlessness. Depression may lead to thoughts of death or suicide.

Bipolar disorder often occurs in cycles—an episode once a month, once a week, once a year, once a season, or as often as once a day.

How Is Bipolar Disorder Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes the diagnosis after an examination and asking about symptoms.

The health care provider may order blood tests or other medical tests to make sure another illness isn't causing the symptoms. Your health care provider will refer you to a specialist (psychiatrist) for additional evaluation if bipolar disorder is suspected.

How Is Bipolar Disorder Treated?

Bipolar disorder is treatable but not curable. Medicine (lithium) is the usual treatment to help even out moods. Some people may need to take lithium for a lifetime, but it isn't addictive. Other medications such as valproate, carbamazepine, olanzapine, risperidone, and quetiapine are also frequently used. Continuous treatment is necessary to prevent relapse of depressive or manic symptoms.

People are often referred to a psychiatrist or for group therapy. Therapists can help people change behaviors that may make the illness worse.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Bipolar Disorder

- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider or someone you trust if you have suicidal thoughts.
- ✓ **DO** talk to your health care provider about any herbal remedies and medicines that you're taking.
- ✓ **DO** try to keep to a routine sleep schedule.
- ✓ **DO** stay active.
- ✓ **DO** find a support group if you think that it might help.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider about your medicine's side effects.

- ✓ **DO** avoid drugs of abuse, especially stimulants such as cocaine, amphetamines, and PCP. They may cause a manic episode.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you feel that you're getting more energetic or can't relax, or your family members or others describe you as hyper.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you notice a decreased need for sleep or have trouble sleeping.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use alcohol or other drugs, such as antihistamines or drugs containing high amounts of caffeine.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drive when you first start a new medicine.
- ⊗ **DON'T** make any major decisions during a mood swing.
- ⊗ **DON'T** stop your medicine or change your dose because you feel better, unless your health care provider tells you to.
- ⊗ **DON'T** change your diet or salt intake while you are taking lithium.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Bipolar Disorders Information Center: Website:
http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/center_index.php?id=4&cn=4
- Depression and Bipolar Alliance: Tel: (800) 826-3632, (312) 642-0049; Website:
<http://www.ndmda.org>
- Mood Disorders Support Group of New York City: Tel: (212) 533-MDSG (533-6374);
Website: <http://www.mdsg.org>

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