

# Bipolar Disorder

## Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is an illness that causes extreme mood swings that can change from depression to elation or mania. How severe and intense the mood swings are will vary.

Some people alternate quickly while others will be in a manic or depression phase for long periods of time (even up to 1 year).

## Symptoms

### ■ Manic phase:

- mood that seems really good, high or euphoric (“high as a kite”)
- optimism (with no reason)
- grandiose delusions (false beliefs)
- risky behavior or feelings that nothing bad will happen (invincibility)
- hyperactivity, rapid speech and making lots of unrealistic plans
- ideas and thoughts racing through the mind
- less need for sleep
- suddenly being irritable, distracted or having rage or paranoia (thinking people are against you).

### ■ Depression phase:

- poor concentration
- feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and helplessness
- thoughts of death or suicide
- sadness that doesn’t stop, crying spells (with no cause)

- being irritable
- stopping activities enjoyed before (social activities, work or sex)
- change in appetite or sleep patterns
- physical symptoms such as chronic (long-lasting) pain, headaches or stomach problems that don’t get better with treatment.

## Causes

Bipolar disorder can run in families. Close relatives of people who have this illness are 10 to 20 times more likely to develop a major depression or bipolar disorder than someone without the genetic connection.

Bipolar disorder occurs about equally in men and women. More than half of the cases begin before the age of 20.

## Treatments

Many other physical and mental disorders are similar to bipolar disorder. To diagnose bipolar disorder, medical and psychiatric exams are needed. Although bipolar disorder cannot be cured, it can be controlled with treatment.

There are 2 main types of treatments:

- **medicine.** There are medicines that treat different aspects of bipolar disorder. Together, you and your health care provider will decide which is right for you.
  - Antidepressants can help relieve the depression phase.

*(over)*

- Lithium salts are used to stabilize moods with minor side effects.
- Anticonvulsant medicines are used to treat the mania phase of the illness.
- Antipsychotic medicines are used to restore rational thinking during depression or manic phases.

■ **talk therapy and support groups.**

Talk therapy can be an important part of treatment for the person and their care circle (family, friends and others who are close). Support groups can provide extra support by talking with others who have found successful ways to cope with bipolar disorder.

Talking with a psychotherapist can:

- provide guidance and education
- help develop insight into behaviors and relationships
- help develop healthy behavior patterns
- encourage compliance with treatment
- develop and carry out plans and ideas to prevent a relapse.

## What the Care Circle Can Do

- Remind the person that you are concerned about them. Encourage the person to talk about how they are feeling. Be an active listener and show support.
- Take the person to all health care provider appointments. Learn all you can about bipolar disorder. You are an important member of the health care team.

Take notes or ask questions about the illness or treatment. For more information, ask your health care provider or visit [allinahealth.org](http://allinahealth.org) or [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov) (National Institute of Mental Health).

- If the person is taking medicine, help make sure they take it as directed. If the person stops taking it, try to find out why. Is the medicine causing side effects? Does the person have negative feelings about taking medicine? Suggest the person make an appointment to talk with his or her health care provider.
- Learn the warning signs of suicide. During the depression phase, the person may have thoughts of suicide. Possible signs of suicide include:
  - talking or writing about suicide
  - being preoccupied with death
  - making a will
  - canceling or not making plans.
- Have an action plan in case the person is suicidal. Make sure the entire family knows what to do. **Call 911 in an emergency.** For other instructions, call:
  - National Hopeline Network, 1-800-784-2433 (free, 24-hour help)
  - Crisis Intervention Center at Hennepin County Medical Center (in Minneapolis), 612-347-2222.
- Support the person during the illness. Invite him or her to participate in events or to talk. Offer your help in whatever way you can.
- Attend talk therapy or counseling with the person, if possible.
- Join a support group for care circles. Ask your health care provider for more information.
- Take care of yourself. You can't help anyone if you are ignoring your own feelings and physical health. Eat healthful foods, get regular exercise, go out with friends or other family, take time for yourself, seek counseling if you feel you need help coping.