

# Teen Bipolar Disorder

## Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is an illness that causes extreme mood swings that vary between depression and mania. How severe and intense the mood swings will be varies.

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

Having bipolar disorder is like having a physical illness. It can and should be treated.

## Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

Symptoms of the depression phase include:

- poor concentration
- feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and helplessness
- thoughts of death or suicide
- sadness that doesn't stop, crying with no cause
- being irritable
- stopping activities enjoyed before (social activities, hobbies)
- change in eating or sleep patterns
- physical symptoms such as chronic (long-lasting) pain, headaches or stomach problems that don't get better with treatment.

Symptoms of the manic phase include:

- feeling really good ("high as a kite")
- feeling overly positive with no reason
- having false beliefs
- doing too many wild or risky things
- being hyperactive, speaking very quickly and making a lot of unrealistic plans
- having ideas and thoughts racing through your mind
- needing less sleep
- being irritable, angry, distracted or fearful that others are trying to harm you.

## Causes

Bipolar disorder can run in families. Close relatives of people who suffer from 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.

## Talk to Someone

It is common for teens to react to the pain of bipolar disorder by turning to alcohol, drugs or sex. Another common reaction is getting into trouble at school and/or with family and friends.

You are not alone and you should not have to suffer alone. If you think you or a friend may have bipolar disorder, talk to someone. Talk to a trusted adult, family member, close friend or your primary care provider. There are people who can help you or your friend get treatment.

## Suicidal Thoughts or Attempts

Most people who have bipolar disorder do not commit suicide although having it does increase the risk for suicide or suicide attempts. It is not true that people who talk about suicide do not attempt it. Any thoughts, comments or attempts at suicide are serious. Please — if you or a friend think about or are considering suicide, get help right away!

## Treatments

Having bipolar disorder doesn't mean you are weak or a failure. You are not alone. Although bipolar disorder cannot be cured, it can be controlled with treatment. The two main treatments include:

### ■ Talk therapy:

Talk therapy can be an important part of treatment for patients and those who care about them. Support groups can provide extra support by talking with others who have found successful ways to cope with bipolar disorder.

### ■ Medicine:

There are medicines that treat different aspects of bipolar disorder. Together, you and your primary care provider will decide which is right for you.

- Antidepressants can help relieve the depression phase.
- Lithium salts are used to stabilize moods with minor side effects.
- Anticonvulsant medicines are used to treat the manic phase of the illness.
- Antipsychotic medicines are used to bring clear thinking back during depression or manic phases.

## What to do in a Crisis

**Never leave someone in crisis alone. If you or someone close to you is in crisis, call:**

- the toll-free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).
- your primary care provider
- 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department. (Ask a family member or friend to help you.)

**Information adapted from the National Institute of Mental Health.**