

Bipolar Disorder in Adults

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WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a disorder of the brain resulting in episodes of mania and depression. These episodes can last days to months. Like other illnesses, the severity of the disorder varies. Most people have periods of relatively normal moods and may go years without a major episode. For others, their symptoms may respond only partially to treatment or may recur even with ongoing treatment. These consumers require careful self-monitoring and frequent medication adjustments.

SOME FACTS:

Bipolar disorder is common. It affects approximately one percent of the adult population or 2.3 million adult Americans. Bipolar illness is seen equally in men and women. A major life event may trigger the first episode. Although bipolar disorder is described as a mood disorder, episodes of illness produce significant changes in a wide range of areas including activity, energy, sleep, appetite, speech, thinking and judgment.

TYPICAL SYMPTOMS OF BIPOLAR DISORDER

MANIA	DEPRESSION
Either an elated, happy mood or an irritable, angry, unpleasant mood	Depressed or apathetic mood
Increased activity or energy	Decreased activity and energy Restlessness and irritability
More thoughts and faster thinking than normal	Fewer thoughts than usual and slowed thinking
Increased talking, more rapid speech than normal	Less talking and slowed speech
Ambitious, often grandiose, plans	Less interest or participation in, and less enjoyment of activities normally engaged in
Poor judgment	Hopeless and helpless feelings Feelings of guilt and worthlessness Pessimistic outlook Thoughts of suicide
Increased sexual interest and activity	Decreased sexual interest and activity
Decreased sleep and decreased need for sleep	Change in sleep patterns (either sleeping more or sleeping less) Change in appetite (either eating more or eating less)

TREATMENT

While there is no cure for bipolar disorder, it is a treatable and manageable illness. After an accurate diagnosis by your physician or psychiatrist, most people can be successfully treated. **Medication** is an essential part of successful treatment for people with bipolar disorder. In

addition, **psychotherapy** and **support groups** are important to help people understand the impact the illness has on their lives and their family's lives.

Changes in medication or doses may be necessary. Treatment plans change during different stages of the illness. Two medications commonly used to treat bipolar disorder are called *mood stabilizers*. They include **lithium** (with brand names such as Eskalith or Lithobid) and divalproex sodium (**Depakote**). Lithium and Depakote are approved by the FDA as a treatment for the manic episodes of bipolar disorder. Consumers with bipolar disorder may need antidepressant medication during periods of depression.

Psychotherapy is useful in understanding the illness, learning how to cope with it, and changing self-defeating patterns of thinking or interacting.

REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide by David J. Miklowitz, Ph.D.

The NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) Helpline 1-800-950-6264

On the Web: www.nami.org

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