



## BIPOLAR DISORDER

Everyone experiences fluctuations in mood. They can change several times a day from sadness to happiness, from boredom to excitement, from anger to contentment. These feelings are normal and last for a relatively short time. This is not the case with Bipolar Disorder, formerly known as Manic Depression. Bipolar Disorder affects approximately 1-3% of the population, affecting both men and women equally.

### Definition

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Bipolar Disorder is an abnormal fluctuation in moods, varying between periods of extreme elation, or marked highs (mania) and profound lows (depression). The dramatic variation in mood is sometimes referred to an “episode” and the frequency, severity, and length of the episodes vary among individuals. Between these extreme episodes, there are periods of more or less “normal” moods.

### Common Symptoms

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Some common signs to look for during a depressed period are:

- Feelings of sadness or irritability
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Changes in sleeping pattern
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Restlessness or decreased activity
- Complaints of physical aches and pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Some common signs to look for during a manic period are:

- Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
- Less need for sleep, or food
- Talking more than usual
- Racing thoughts or ideas
- Easily distracted
- Feeling restless and increasing activity
- Having delusions and/or hallucinations
- Loss of self-control and judgment
- Irritability or excitability
- Impulsive behaviours
- Creative or bizarre thinking

## **Causes of Bipolar Disorder**

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The causes are varied. They may include:

- Biochemical imbalance in the brain
- Heredity
- Environment in which one lives and works
- Medical conditions

## **Treatment**

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Effective treatment often involves medication and/or psychotherapy and depends on:

- The person's optimism, hope and energy
- The number and types of stressors present
- The severity of symptoms
- How long the person has suffered from bipolar
- The results of previous treatment
- The support of family, friends and significant others

## **How to Help**

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- Treat the person as an adult
- Emphasize the positive
- Acknowledge effort
- Use humour
- State clear expectations
- Deal with problems as they arise
- Don't lose hope
- Recognize that stigma exists
- Learn more about bipolar and its treatment

## **Where to Go For Help**

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- Family and friends
- General practitioners
- Self-help groups
- Counsellor
- Psychiatrist
- Social worker or psychologist
- Distress or crisis lines