

The Truth About Bipolar Disorder

By Craig Miller

Since the term Bipolar is tossed around to describe someone with mood changes, it's time to hear the truth. Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is an illness involving one or more episodes of severe mood changes. The illness causes a person's mood to swing from excessively "high" (mania) and/or irritable to sad and hopeless (depression), with periods of a normal mood in between. More than 2 million Americans suffer from bipolar disorder which typically begins in adolescence or early adulthood and can continue throughout life. It is often not recognized as an illness and people who have it may suffer needlessly for years.

Bipolar disorder can be extremely distressing and disruptive for those who have this disease, their spouses, family members, friends and employers. Bipolar disorder is treatable, and recovery is possible. Individuals with bipolar disorder have successful relationships and meaningful jobs. It is believed bipolar is from a biochemical imbalance which alters a person's moods. Studies show that up to ninety percent of those with bipolar have relatives with some form of depression. People may inherit a tendency to develop the illness, which can then be triggered by environmental factors such as distressing life events.

There be two different phases with Bipolar swings- Manic phase and depressive phase. The symptoms of mania which can last up to three months if untreated may include:

- Excessive energy, activity, restlessness, racing thoughts and rapid talking
- Euphoric feelings, grand ideas, and nothing, including bad news or tragic events, can change this "happiness."
- Exaggerated confidence, excessive social plans, and unrealistic beliefs.
- Easily irritated or distracted, decreased need for sleep.
- Uncharacteristically poor judgment, poor decisions, reckless driving, spending sprees and foolish business ventures. Behavior different from usual, dress and/or act differently, poor personal care, experience delusions, unusual sexual drive, and abuse of drugs or alcohol.

The symptoms of the depressive phase may include:

- The symptoms of the depressive phase may include:
- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Sleeping too much or too little, middle-of-the-night or early morning waking
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex
- Irritability or restlessness

- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- Thoughts of death or suicide, including suicide attempts
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless

Prescription medications has long been the traditional method to help balance mood swings. There has also become more interest with alternative/natural healing methods such as naturopathic treatment and prayer that have shown to bring successful results. Whichever you choose it is advisable to meet with a professional trained to diagnose and treat this type of condition, and meet with a counselor to help with emotional, social, and lifestyle adjustments. For additional information and self-help groups you can contact Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, (800) 826-3632, Website URL: www.dbsalliance.org or National Institute of Mental Health, 1-866-615- 6464, Website URL: www.nimh.nih.gov

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