

Bipolar Disorder

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes extreme mood swings. This condition is also called manic-depressive illness. It may be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.

Bipolar disorder sometimes runs in families. If you have a parent who has bipolar disorder, you have a greater chance of having it. Both men and women can have bipolar disorder. People of all ages can have it.

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What are some of the signs of bipolar disorder?

At times, a person who has bipolar disorder may feel very happy, full of energy and able to do anything. The person might not even want to rest when he or she feels this way. This feeling is called mania (say: "may-nee-ah"). At other times, a person who has bipolar disorder may feel very sad and depressed. The person may not want to do anything when he or she feels this way. This is called depression. People with bipolar disorder can quickly go from mania to depression and back again.

Other signs of mania may include the following:

- Feeling very irritable or angry
- Thinking and talking so fast that other people can't follow your thoughts
- Not sleeping at all
- Feeling very powerful and important
- Having trouble concentrating
- Spending too much money
- Abusing alcohol and drugs
- Having sex without being careful to prevent pregnancy or disease

Other signs of depression may include the following:

- No interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy, including sex
- Feeling sad or numb
- Crying easily or for no reason
- Feeling slowed down, or feeling restless and irritable
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Change in appetite; unintended change in weight
- Trouble recalling things, concentrating or making decisions
- Headaches, backaches or digestive problems
- Problems sleeping, or wanting to sleep all of the time
- Feeling tired all of the time
- Thoughts about death and suicide

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How is bipolar disorder treated?

Bipolar disorder can be treated by your family doctor. Your family doctor may want you to see a psychiatrist too. You and your doctors will work together to control your mood swings and make sure you stay well.

Bipolar disorder is treated with medicines to stop the mood swings. Mood stabilizers are used to even out highs and lows in your mood. Antidepressant medicine can help reduce the symptoms of depression. Your doctor may add other medicines as you need them. These medicines don't start to work right away, but you will start to notice a difference in your moods after a few weeks. Be sure to take your medicines just as your doctor tells you.

Counseling can help you with stress, family concerns and relationship problems. It's important to get counseling if you have bipolar disorder.

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What can I do to help myself get better?

- Read about bipolar disorder and tell your family what you learn. Your doctor can suggest resources to help you learn more.
- Have a regular routine. Go to bed and wake up at about the same time every day. Eat your meals and exercise at regular times.
- Take your medicine every day, and don't stop taking it even if you start feeling better. Avoid caffeine and over-the-counter medicines for colds, allergies and pain. Ask your doctor before you drink alcohol or use any other medicines.
- Try to avoid stress.
- Learn the early warning signs of your illness. Tell your doctor when you notice changes in your mood or behavior.
- Join a local support group. You and your family can share information and experiences with the support group.

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Source

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