



Bipolar Disorders: A Fact Sheet to Share

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is a mental illness involving episodes of serious mania (extreme energy or excitability) and depression. The illness causes a person's mood to swing from excessively high to very low, with periods of normal mood in between. Some people may find that they have periods where symptoms of both mania and depression occur at the same time. An individual with bipolar disorder has a biochemical imbalance that alters the person's moods and ability to control behavior. Bipolar disorder is genetic and often strikes before the age of 35. However, many older adults were undiagnosed in their youth, since many serious mental disorders were poorly identified in the past.

Symptoms of Mania Include:

- Excessive energy, activity, restlessness
- Excessively high mood, euphoric feelings
- Irritability
- Increased energy and less need for sleep
- Rapid or excessive talking, racing thoughts, hyperactivity, hypersexuality
- Impulsive decisions and behavior, poor judgement, reckless behavior
- Easily distracted
- Unrealistic belief in one's ability and powers, loss of touch with reality

Symptoms of Depression Include:

- Sad, empty or anxious mood that won't go away
- Irregular sleep, persistent fatigue
- Loss of interest in ordinary or pleasurable activities
- Complaints of aches, pains and physical ailments with no physical explanation
- Agitation and restlessness
- Problems focusing, concentrating, and remembering
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Change in weight and appetite, neglect of self-care
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, hopelessness or strong negativity
- Suicidal thoughts

Treatment is critical for recovery. A combination of medication, professional help and support from family, friends and peers helps individuals with bipolar disorder stabilize their emotions and behavior. Most people can be treated with medication that brings various neurotransmitters in the brain into balance. Guidance, education and support from a mental health professional and/or support groups can help an individual with bipolar disorder deal with personal relationships, self-esteem issues and treatment compliance. When successfully treated, individuals with bipolar disorder can lead very productive and fulfilling lives.

For information about finding treatment, look for the Maryland Coalition on Mental Health and Aging's fact sheet "[Accessing Mental Health Care in Maryland.](#)"

More information can be found on the website www.mdaging.org

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