

Bipolar

EHC Patient Education Module

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is a biological disorder. This chronic (lifelong) illness causes unusual shifts in your mood, energy, and ability to function.

When you have bipolar disorder, your mood shifts are severe — quite different from normal, everyday ups and downs. Untreated, these mood shifts can hurt your relationships and your performance at work or school. They cause poor decisions and distort your sense of self. Not surprisingly, people with untreated bipolar disorder are at risk for suicide.

But there is good news. Bipolar disorder is highly treatable. With good medical help for your illness, you can lead a full

What Are the Symptoms of Depression?

Mood: mood swings, sadness, elevated mood, anger, anxiety, apathy, apprehension, euphoria, general discontent, guilt, hopelessness, inability to feel pleasure, or loss of interest

Behavioral: irritability, risky behavior, disorganized behavior, aggression, agitation, crying, excess desire for sex, hyperactivity, impulsivity, or self-harm

Cognitive: unwanted thoughts, delusion, lack of concentration, racing thoughts, slowness in activity and thought, or false belief of superiority

Psychological: depression, manic episode, agitated depression, or paranoia

Sleep: difficulty falling asleep or excess sleepiness

Whole body: fatigue or restlessness

Weight: weight gain or weight loss

Also common: rapid and frenzied speaking

What Causes Depression?

Bipolar disorder seems to often run in families and there appears to be a genetic part to this mood disorder. There is also growing evidence that environment and lifestyle issues have an effect on the disorder's severity. Stressful life events -- or alcohol or drug abuse -- can make bipolar disorder more difficult to treat.

Experts believe bipolar disorder is partly caused by an underlying problem with specific brain circuits and the balance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.

Three brain chemicals -- noradrenaline (norepinephrine), serotonin, and dopamine -- are involved in both brain and bodily functions. Noradrenaline and serotonin have been consistently linked to psychiatric mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder. Dopamine is commonly linked with the pleasure system of the brain. Disruption to the dopamine system is connected to psychosis and schizophrenia, a severe mental disorder characterized by distortions in reality and illogical thought patterns and behaviors.

The brain chemical serotonin is connected to many body functions such as sleep, wakefulness, eating, sexual activity, impulsivity, learning, and memory. Researchers believe that abnormal functioning of brain circuits that involve serotonin as a chemical messenger contribute to mood disorders (depression and bipolar disorder).

Many studies of bipolar patients and their relatives have shown that bipolar disorder can run in families.

Along with a genetic link to bipolar disorder, research shows that children of bipolar parents are often surrounded by significant environmental stressors. That may include living with a parent who has a tendency toward mood swings, alcohol or substance abuse, financial and sexual indiscretions, and hospitalizations. Although most children of a bipolar parent will not develop bipolar disorder, some children of bipolar parents may develop a different psychiatric disorder such as ADHD, major depression, schizophrenia, or substance abuse.

How is Bipolar Treated?

Bipolar is treatable. Appropriate treatment, such as medication and psychotherapy, relieves symptoms for most adults. It is very important for you to be an active participant in your treatment. You can do this by selecting the most appropriate treatment, monitoring your treatment and following-up with your health professional. If people receive proper treatment for Bipolar they will feel more stable, hopeful, focused and involved in daily activities.