

Bipolar Disorder

“The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.” 1 Samuel 10:6

Bipolar disorder, formerly known as Manic-depressive illness, is a condition with extreme swings in mood. These vary from deep depression to a high, manic state. This is very different from the normal highs and lows we all feel, because these extreme mood swings interfere with daily life. Over 2 million Americans suffer with this condition, which usually begins in the late teens or early 20's. It can be difficult to diagnose, because people typically seek help only when they are deeply depressed. They are often misdiagnosed with depression, and do not get the treatment they need.

There is no single cause of Bipolar disorder, but it does tend to run in families. There is certainly a chemical imbalance in the brain, and possibly hormone imbalances, that are felt to be the prime factors in this condition.

Symptoms vary between manic and depressive episodes. Typical symptoms of mania may include:

- Very high energy and activity levels
- Excessively high, euphoric mood
- Extreme irritability and anxiety
- Inability to concentrate, racing thoughts
- Very little sleep, excessive spending
- Increased sexual drive, drug abuse
- Denial that anything is wrong

Symptoms of depression may include:

- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- No interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Too much sleep, or insomnia
- Change in appetite, with weight gain or loss
- Physical symptoms with no physical cause
- Thoughts of suicide

There can also be a “mixed state,” with manic and depressive symptoms happening at the same time. For nearly everyone, there are long periods between episodes when they feel perfectly normal.

While treatment will vary from one person to the next, it generally consists of medications, psychotherapy, and educating one's self on how to manage the condition. For most people, treatment is a life long requirement. Medications need to be prescribed and monitored by a psychiatrist. They are the experts on the condition, and are up to date on the latest research in this area. Generally, a mood stabilizer will be prescribed, and possibly an antidepressant, also. A thyroid gland that is producing too much or too little thyroid hormone can change the amount of energy a person has, and needs to be monitored too.

Psychotherapy, or talk therapy, is very useful to support patients and their families. Therapists can check a patient's progress, and teach them about their illness and ways to identify triggers, which can propel a person into another episode. They can help the patient identify early signs of an episode, allowing them to seek help before progressing to a full-scale episode.

With the proper treatment and motivation, people who are bipolar can live a relatively normal life. Regular daily activities that are good advice for all of us can be especially important to maintain a relatively constant

mood. Regular sleep and mealtimes, 30 minutes of exercise a day, and avoiding illegal drugs are very important for anyone with a bipolar disorder. Some stressful events such as holidays, weddings, arguments, funerals, and job problems cannot be avoided. That is why it is so important to have a relationship with a therapist who can give support when it is needed. We are fortunate to live in an age where there is abundant help for anyone with this serious condition.

For more information:

www.bipolar.com

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/bipolardisorder.html