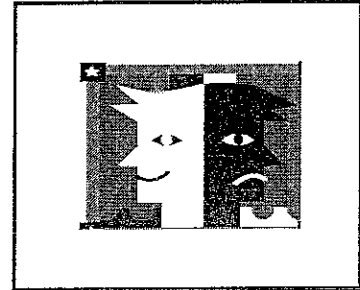


LIVING WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER

Everyone has good and bad days. Often they are related to something that happens to you. Sometimes you feel a little depressed or irritable about a troubling situation. You might also feel quite energized, happy, and goal driven on other days. These feelings are quite normal.

On the other hand there is a mental condition called bipolar disorder (manic-depressive) in which the moods are extreme, unmanageable, and can interfere with work, relationships, health, finances and can generally disrupt your life. Approximately one to two percent of the population has bipolar disorder although the diagnosis is often missed. This is partially due to the fact that some symptoms overlap with several other mental disorders and there are different presentations for each individual .



Bipolar disorder is a chronic illness with episodes of extreme depression and other periods of extreme manic behavior that can last for weeks or months at a time. Possible symptoms of mania include euphoria or irritability and agitation; hyperactivity; talkativeness; risk taking behavior such as excessive spending, sex, and gambling; and grandiose delusions of success. In a manic state some individuals can become very aggressive and irrational. The depressive phase can appear as extreme sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, and possibly suicidal thinking..

Bipolar disorder can take several forms including *Cyclothymic*, *Bipolar II*, and *Bipolar I*. Cyclothymic disorder is a manifestation of bipolar disorder with only periodic and less severe elevation in mood referred to as *hypomania* and milder forms of depression. Bipolar II is the most common and typically depression is more common with this form of the disease and manic symptoms are less frequent. In Bipolar I there are recurrent depressive episodes with at least one hypomanic episode. Severe symptoms of mania or depression can even include visual or auditory hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not real) or delusions (strongly held but false beliefs). Mixed episodes have symptoms of both mania and depression. Mood states for bipolar disorder may be viewed as a spectrum from extreme forms of depression, mild depression, balanced mood, to hypomania and finally severe mania. The diagnostic picture is complicated by the variety of symptoms that may be presented with each patient ; possible co-occurrence of mental disorders such as anxiety, attention deficit disorder, or some other mental disorder; and by the frequency of cycling from one phase to another. People with bipolar disorder may also abuse substances such as alcohol or drugs which can mask symptoms and may be an attempt to self medicate.

If left untreated bipolar disorder can be very debilitating however there are treatments that can allow you to live a normal life. Before seeking professional help, you should be sure to document

any symptoms and pattern of symptoms. This can help the doctor to make an accurate diagnosis. Asking a spouse or close friend about symptoms they have observed can also help to complete the picture. Medication management is one of the central components of treatment for bipolar disorder and a psychiatrist will need to be consulted regarding the appropriate medications, doses and the regimen. Sometimes people stop taking their medications because they love the energy of manic episodes. It is important to take medication consistently as prescribed even when you are feeling well. Lifestyle can also influence the course of bipolar disorder. Limiting stressful situations, establishing routines, getting enough sleep, eating properly, and exercising are all helpful strategies to avoid extreme episodes of either mania or depression. Seek the support of a psychologist who is familiar with the disorder to help you learn to manage symptoms and negotiate difficult social and occupational situations. Counseling can help you learn to manage the symptoms of bipolar disorder along with any other disorders, help you to recognize if symptoms are recurring, and provide you with consistent support. Families should also be included in counseling to help them understand the disease.