



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Bipolar Disorder**

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness or manic-depression, is a serious disorder of the brain that affects more than 2 million people each year. Bipolar disorder is characterized by mood swings from excessive emotional highs (**mania**) to deep emotional lows (**depression**), usually having periods of relative normalcy in between. Although some people have been known to experience symptoms of mania and depression at the same time (**mixed state**), the frequency of mood swings are known to vary from person-to-person.

Bipolar disorder has a powerful affect on a person's thoughts, feelings, physical health, behavior, and overall functioning. The onset of this illness typically begins in adolescence or early adulthood. If a person over in their 40's or 50's experiences a manic episode for the first time, other causes need to be ruled out like effects of prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs, a neurological disorder, or the effects of drugs and/or alcohol. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 60 percent of people with bipolar disorder have drug and/or alcohol abuse or dependence problems - the highest rate among patients with major psychiatric illnesses.

There is no exact cause for bipolar disorder, although research suggests that is an inherited illness linked by a lack of stability in the transmission of nerve impulses in the brain, making bipolar persons more vulnerable to emotional and physical stressors.

The Bipolar Info Online web site (www.windmill.net) has provided the following descriptions of the most common patterns of this disorder:

Manic State

- Abnormally Elevated Mood
- Decreased need for sleep
- Extreme Irritability
- Inappropriate Social Behavior
- Increased Interest in Activities
- Increased Sexual Drive
- Increased Strength and Energy
- Increased Talking
- Overspending
- Poor Judgment
- Racing Thoughts
- Grandiosity, Inflated Self-esteem
- Unpredictable Emotional Changes

Depressive State

- Lack of Energy
- Change in Eating Habits
- Crying Easily
- Decreased Self-Care
- Decreased Sexual Drive
- Increased Physical Complaints
- Feelings of Guilt
- Loss of Self-Esteem
- Sleep Problems
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Loss of Interest at Work, Family, and Friends
- Preoccupation with Failures and Inadequacies

- **Bipolar I Disorder:** a person has manic or mixed episodes and almost always has depression as well.
- **Bipolar II Disorder:** a person has only hypomanic and depressive episodes, not full manic or mixed episodes.
- **Rapid Cycling Disorder:** a person has at least four episodes per year, in any combination of manic, hypomanic, or depressive episodes.
- **Schizoaffective Disorder:** In addition to mania or depression, there are persistent psychotic symptoms (hallucinations or delusions) during times when mood symptoms are under control. In contrast, in bipolar disorder, any psychotic symptoms that occur during severe episodes of mania or depression end as mood returns to normal.



Treatments for Bipolar Disorder

Before bipolar treatment begins, a person should have a complete physical examination and a medical history review to rule out any other possible causes for the symptoms being experienced.

The most successful treatment involves a combination of medication and psychotherapy. Monitored medication programs involving mood stabilizers and antidepressants are commonly used to reduce the frequency of the highs and the lows, while psychotherapy helps the clients and families solve their problems and deal with the stresses brought on by this disorder. Unfortunately, there is no cure for bipolar disorder, but it has become a readily-treatable condition. In fact, The Expert Consensus Treatment Guidelines for Bipolar Disorder reports that many people with bipolar disorder will be completely free of symptoms by taking mood stabilizing medication for life.



How Can A Person Cope with Bipolar Disorder?

The Glaxo Wellcome Research and Development website (www.bipolar.com) and offers the following tips on how people can help themselves cope with bipolar disorder:

Bipolar disorder is a lifelong, chronic condition. It cannot be cured, but in most cases it can be managed with treatment. Some general guidelines are:

- Exercise regularly.
- Establish a regular sleep pattern and a regular eating pattern to maintain steady blood sugar.
- Avoid artificial stimulants and depressants like recreational drugs and alcohol.
- Educate yourself about the illness and its treatment.
There are several support groups for people with bipolar disorder who can provide a wealth of information and practical advice.
- Become aware of your mood states and learn to recognize the warning signs of an impending relapse. Keep a daily mood calendar and bring this to your doctor visits.
- Take your medication as prescribed by your physician. Remember that bipolar disorder in most people requires long term treatment to prevent relapses.
- Structure your life the best you can. There is some evidence that maintaining a regular structure to your daily activities reduces the risk of relapse.
- Monitor stress and increase self care during stressful times.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Web Site
www.portagepath.org

Appointments 330-253-3100
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline 330-434-9144
888-434-8878



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