

# Bipolar Disorder

## What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a brain disorder that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and functioning. It is characterized by episodes of mania or depression that can last from days to months. It generally requires ongoing treatment.

## What are the symptoms of mania?

Mania is the word that describes the activated phase of bipolar disorder. The symptoms of mania may include:

- Either an elated, happy mood or an irritable, angry, unpleasant mood with increased activity or energy
- More thoughts and faster thinking than normal
- Increased talking, more rapid speech than normal
- Ambitious, often grandiose, plans
- Increased sexual interest and activity
- Decreased sleep and decreased need for sleep

## What are the symptoms of depression?

Depression is the other phase of bipolar disorder. The symptoms of depression may include:

- Depressed or apathetic mood
- Decreased activity and energy
- Restlessness and irritability
- Fewer thoughts than usual and slowed thinking
- Less talking and slowed speech
- Less interest or participation in and less enjoyment of activities normally enjoyed
- Decreased sexual interest and activity
- Hopeless and helpless feelings
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Pessimistic outlook
- Thoughts of suicide
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleep patterns

## What are the causes of bipolar disorder?

It is the result of a chemical imbalance of the brain. Bipolar disorder tends to run in families. Sometimes a serious loss, chronic illness, or financial problem, can trigger an episode.

## How is bipolar disorder treated?

Medication is an essential part of treatment. Maintenance treatment with a mood stabilizer reduces the number and severity of episodes for most people. In addition, psychosocial therapies, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, family therapy, and psychoeducation, are important.

## *Bipolar Disorder, cont'd.*

Medications commonly used to treat manic episodes of bipolar disorder are anticonvulsant medications.

Mania may also be treated acutely with antipsychotic medications in addition to a mood stabilizer. Additional clinical research is being conducted to test the safety and efficacy of atypical antipsychotics as therapeutic options in the long-term treatment of bipolar disorder.

During depressive episodes, people with bipolar disorder may need additional treatment with an antidepressant medication.

### **What are the side effects of the medications used to treat bipolar disorder?**

- Hand tremors
- Excessive thirst/dry mouth
- Excessive urination
- Excessive memory problems
- Nausea
- Dizziness and tremors
- Liver problems or problems with white blood cell count and blood platelets, which can be severe
- Constipation
- Bladder problems
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Skin rash
- Weight gain or loss
- Severe high blood pressure after eating certain foods
- Nervousness
- Insomnia
- Diarrhea
- Rash
- Agitation
- Sexual problems

All medications have side effects. Different medications produce different side effects, and people differ in the amount and severity of side effects they experience. Side effects can often be treated by changing the dose of the medication, switching to a different medication, or treating the side effect directly with an additional medication.

Discuss side effects you are experiencing with your doctor.

