

BIPOLAR DISORDER

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

Description

Bipolar disorder consists of cyclical changes from depressive states to manic states and is more than the usual ups and downs or mood swings that people experience. These recurring episodes of depression and mania cause extreme shifts in mood, energy, and behavior that interfere with normal functioning. These shifts in mood are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain as opposed to environmental events.

Symptoms & Features

A thorough mental health diagnostic evaluation should be sought immediately if you suspect you are cycling between depression and mania. Depressive symptoms include: 1) depressed (sad or empty) mood most of the day, 2) loss of interest or pleasure in usually enjoyable activities, 3) appetite/weight gain or loss, 4) disturbed sleep (insomnia or excess sleep), 5) lowered energy level/fatigued, 6) Restlessness or feeling slowed down, 7) feelings of worthlessness or excess guilt, 8) indecisiveness or lack of concentration, 9) suicidal thoughts or feelings. Manic symptoms include: 1) inflated self-esteem or grandiosity, 2) decreased need for sleep (ability to go with little or no sleep for days without tiring), 3) pressured speech or being very talkative, 4) racing thoughts, 5) distractibility, 6) increased goal directed activity (being very productive), 7) engaging in risky behavior or excessive pleasurable activity (such as sex or spending).

Bipolar disorder is often misdiagnosed and can manifest in variations besides the usual depression/manic cycling. Other manifestations include: hypomanic episodes (Bipolar II), mixed episodes, and cyclothymia. Even traditional bipolar disorder can look very different from person to person. Symptoms vary widely in pattern, severity, and frequency. Diagnosing bipolar disorder or its variants is complex and difficult. The diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorders should be left to specialists in mental health such as psychologists and psychiatrists. The clinicians at I.P.C. can help.

Treatment

Bipolar disorder is best treated with a combination of medications and psychotherapy. The best course of treatment for each person is something that should be discussed with your physician or mental health therapist. Medications used to treat bipolar disorders are a class of drugs called mood stabilizers, which include Lithium and a variety of anticonvulsant drugs. Occasionally other medications such as anti-depressants or anti-psychotics are added to assist with further stabilization of the depressive or manic symptoms. Typically treatment with mood stabilizers is continued for extended periods of time (years). Studies have shown that psychotherapy can lead to increased mood stabilization, fewer hospitalizations, and improved functioning. In most cases, when caught early, bipolar disorder can be treated on an out-patient basis. However, if symptoms are severe, include psychosis, or there is risk of suicidality, partial or in-patient hospitalization may be needed.

What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you are experiencing cyclical symptoms of bipolar disorder, or at anytime have suicidal thoughts, you should see a healthcare professional right away. It is important not to ignore symptoms. This often leads to mild symptoms becoming moderate or severe over time. You should get assessed by a psychiatrist or psychologist at I.P.C. who can assist in making a diagnosis and figure out the best course of treatment. In addition, you can read about bipolar disorder and its treatment. You can join a bipolar support group, and seek the support of family and friends. Maintaining regular daily routines and sleep schedules may help to protect against manic episodes.