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Bipolar Disorder

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes extreme mood swings. This condition is also called manic-depressive illness or manic depression. It may be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.

Bipolar disorder sometimes runs in families. If you have a parent who has bipolar disorder, you have a greater chance of having it. Both men and women can have bipolar disorder. People of all ages can have it.

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What are some of the signs of bipolar disorder?

At times, a person who has bipolar disorder may feel very happy, full of energy and able to do anything. The person may not want to rest when feeling this way. This feeling is called mania (say: "may-nee-ah"). At other times, a person who has bipolar disorder may feel very sad and depressed. The person may not want to do anything when he or she feels this way. This is called depression. People who have bipolar disorder can quickly go from mania to depression and back again.

Other signs of mania include the following:

- Feeling very irritable or angry
- Thinking and talking so fast that other people can't follow your thoughts
- Not sleeping at all
- Feeling very powerful and important
- Having trouble concentrating
- Spending too much money
- Abusing alcohol and drugs
- Having sex without being careful to prevent pregnancy or disease

Other signs of depression include the following:

- No interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy, including sex
- Feeling sad or numb
- Crying easily or for no reason
- Feeling slowed down, or feeling restless and irritable
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Change in appetite; unintended change in weight
- Trouble recalling things, concentrating or making decisions
- Headaches, backaches or digestive problems
- Problems sleeping, or wanting to sleep all of the time
- Feeling tired all of the time

- Thoughts about death and suicide

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Are there different kinds of bipolar disorder?

Yes. There are several different kinds of bipolar disorder. Which kind you have depends on how quickly you move from manic episodes to depression and back again, as well as how severe your symptoms are.

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How is bipolar disorder treated?

Your family doctor can treat bipolar disorder. Your family doctor may want you to see a psychiatrist too. You and your doctors will work together to control your mood swings and make sure you stay well.

Bipolar disorder is treated with medicines to stop the mood swings. Mood stabilizers are used to even out highs and lows in your mood. Antidepressant medicine can help reduce the symptoms of depression. Your doctor may add other medicines as you need them. These medicines don't start to work right away, but you will start to notice a difference in your moods after a few weeks. Be sure to take your medicines just as your doctor tells you.

Counseling can help you with stress, family concerns and relationship problems. It's important to get counseling if you have bipolar disorder.

Some people who have bipolar disorder don't want to get treatment. Often, they don't realize how much it affects their lives and the lives of the people around them. Also, they feel very productive and powerful during the manic phase and are reluctant to give this up.

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What can I do to help myself get better?

- Share all of your symptoms, health history and family health history with your doctor. Many people who have bipolar disorder are not correctly diagnosed. A correct diagnosis give you the best chance at getting helpful treatment.
- Read about bipolar disorder and tell your family what you learn. Your doctor can suggest resources to help you learn more.
- Have a regular routine. Go to bed and wake up at about the same time every day. Eat meals that are good for you and exercise at regular times.
- Take your medicine every day, and don't stop taking it even if you start feeling better. It may take time for your medicine and therapy to have an effect on your life. Try to be patient and stay focused on your goals.
- Avoid caffeine and over-the-counter medicines for colds, allergies and pain. Ask your doctor before you drink alcohol or use any other medicines.
- Try to avoid stress.
- Learn the early warning signs of your illness. Tell your doctor when you notice changes in your mood or behavior.
- Join a support group. You and your family can share information and experiences with the support group.

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Other Organizations

- [National Alliance for the Mentally Ill](http://www.nami.org)
<http://www.nami.org>
- [Mental Health America](http://www.nmha.org)
<http://www.nmha.org>
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](http://www.dbsalliance.org/)
<http://www.dbsalliance.org/>

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Source

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