

Bipolar Disorder



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org

Bipolar disorder causes huge changes in a person's mood, energy, and ability to think clearly. It has high moods called mania and low moods called depression. Although bipolar disorder can develop anytime, the average age is 25.

What are the symptoms?

A person with bipolar disorder may have very high or low moods. If it is severe, they may have psychotic episodes. This means they see or hear things that are not there or have beliefs that are not true.

- **Mania.** Mania is a very high mood. Some signs of mania are:
 - Difficulty sleeping or not being tired
 - Talking very fast about a lot of different things
 - Making poor choices, not thinking things through
 - Taking huge risks
 - Getting upset easily
 - Hypomania happens when some of these signs happen but are not as extreme as mania.
- **Depression:** Depression is a low mood. It can make it hard for people to live their daily life. Some signs of depression are:
 - Feeling very sad
 - Feeling very tired or sleeping a lot
 - Feeling angry, guilty, or worthless
 - Eating too much or too little
 - Not being interested in fun activities
 - Thoughts of death or suicide

What are the causes?

Many things can cause bipolar disorder. Some of these are:

- **Family History.** Bipolar disorder can run in families.
- **Stressful events.** A stressful event, like losing a job or moving, can lead to bipolar disorder.
- **Brain Structure.** Some parts of the brain are different for those with bipolar disorder. Damage to the brain may also lead to bipolar disorder.

Diagnosis

People with bipolar disorder can be incorrectly diagnosed as schizophrenic. To have a bipolar illness, a person must have had at least one episode of mania or hypomania. There are four types of bipolar illness:

1. **Bipolar I Disorder** when a person experiences one or more episodes of mania and depression, lasting at least 7 days, or be so severe that they require hospitalization.
2. **Bipolar II Disorder** is a subset of bipolar disorder where people experience depressive episodes, back and forth with hypomanic episodes, but never a full manic episode.
3. **Cyclothymia.** When a person has unstable moods for at least two years. They may have periods of normal mood, that are short.
4. **Bipolar Disorder "other specified" and "unspecified".** Diagnosed when a person does not fall into the other categories.

Treatment

Treatment for bipolar disorders must be lifelong. Some treatment options include.

- **Medications**, such as mood stabilizers, antipsychotic medications, and antidepressants.
- **Psychotherapy**, such as Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and family therapy.
- **Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)**
- **Self-management Education**
- **Complementary Health Approaches**, such as meditation, faith, and prayer.