



apd

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PERSONS WITH  
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## More information

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Depression & Anxiety  
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0800 70 80 90  
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**Suicide Helpline**  
0800 567 567  
SMS : 31393

**Mental Health Line**  
(011) 262-6396

**Substance Abuse**  
0800 12 13 14  
SMS : 32313

adding  
value  
to  
lives

## Focus on

# Bipolar disorder

(manic depression)

### WHAT IS A BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder is a physical illness marked by extreme changes in mood, energy and behaviour. That's why doctors classify it as a mood disorder. Bipolar disorder – also known as manic-depressive illness – is a mental illness involving episodes of serious mania and depression. The person's mood usually swings from overly "high" and irritable to sad and hopeless, and then back again, with periods of normal mood in between.

Bipolar disorder typically begins in adolescence or early adulthood and continues throughout life. It is often not recognised as an illness, and people who have it may suffer needlessly for years or even decades.

### WHAT CAUSES BIPOLAR DISORDER (OR MANIC DEPRESSION)?

The exact cause of manic depression is not known, but it is believed to be a combination of factors.

**Biochemistry** : Research has shown that this disorder is associated with a chemical imbalance in the brain, which can be corrected with appropriate medication.

**Genetics / Hereditary** : Bipolar disorder tends to run in families. Researchers have identified a number of genes that may be linked to the disorder. However, if you have bipolar disorder and your spouse does not, there is only a 1 in 7 chance that your child will develop it.

**Biological Clocks** : Mania and depression are often cyclical, occurring at particular times of the year. Changes in biological rhythms, including sleep and hormone changes, characterise the illness. Changes in the seasons are often associated triggers.

**Psychological Stress** : People who are genetically susceptible may have a faulty "switch-off" point – emotional excitement may keep escalating into mania: setbacks may worsen into profound depression.

Sometimes a stressful life event such as a loss of a job, marital difficulties, or a death in the family may trigger an episode of mania or depression. At other times, episodes occur for no apparent reason.

### WHO GETS MANIC DEPRESSION?

Manic depression is common – affecting about 1% of the population. Men and women are equally affected. While the disorder has been seen in children, the usual age of onset is late adolescence and early adulthood. Mania, occasionally appears for the first time in the elderly, and when it does, it is often related to another medical disorder. Manic depression is not restricted to any social or educational class, race, or nationality. Although an equal number of men and women develop the illness, men tend to have

more manic episodes. Women experience more depressive episodes.

### IS MANIC DEPRESSION TREATABLE?

Fortunately, the answer to this question is "yes". Treatment in the form of medication and counselling can be effective for most people with manic depression. The earlier treatment is started, the more effective it may be in preventing future episodes.

Bipolar disorder is similar to other lifelong illnesses – such as high blood pressure and diabetes – in that it cannot be "cured". It can, however, be managed successfully through proper treatment, which allows most patients to return to productive lives.

### SYMPTOMS

#### Manic

- Feeling unusually "high", euphoric or irritable
- Little sleep, but great amounts of energy
- Talking fast— others can't follow your thinking
- Racing thoughts
- Easily distracted
- Inflated feeling of power or importance
- Reckless behaviour
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs

#### Depressive

- Feeling sad, "blue" or down in the dumps
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of appetite or eating too much
- Problems concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling slowed down or too agitated to sit still
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of energy
- Prolonged sadness or crying spells
- Pessimism or indifference
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Hallucination or delusions

### HOW DO I GET HELP?

If you suspect that you, a family member, or a friend has manic depression, you should consult a mental health professional. Since proper diagnosis is essential for effective treatment, see someone who is knowledgeable about manic depression. Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. In addition to providing counselling, they are the only mental health professionals who can prescribe medication. Clinical psychologists, clinical social workers and nurse specialists can also diagnose and provide counselling and psychotherapy.

The outlook for people with bipolar disorder today is optimistic. Many new and promising treatments are being developed and with the right treatment most should be able to lead full and productive lives.