

# Bipolar Mood Disorder

## What is bipolar mood disorder?

Bipolar mood 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.



## Causes

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 appropriated 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.

## Symptoms

### Depressive

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| Feeling unusually "high", euphoric or irritable – | – Feeling sad, "blue" or down in the dumps         |
| Little sleep, but great amounts of energy –       | – Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much            |
| Talking fast— others can't follow your thinking – | – Loss of appetite or eating too much              |
| Racing thoughts –                                 | – Problems concentrating or making decisions       |
| Easily distracted –                               | – Feeling slowed down or too agitated to sit still |
| Inflated feeling of power or importance –         | – Low self-esteem                                  |
| Reckless behaviour –                              | – Loss of energy                                   |
| Abuse of alcohol or drugs –                       | – Prolonged sadness or crying spells               |
|   | – Pessimism or indifference                        |
|   | – Thoughts of suicide or death                     |
|   | – Hallucination or delusions                       |

### Manic

## Treatment

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.