

# Bipolar Disorder



## Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

- What bipolar disorder is
- What causes it
- Signs or symptoms of bipolar disorder
- What treatments can help



## **What is bipolar disorder?**

Bipolar disorder is a medical condition. It is also called manic depression.

If you have bipolar disorder, you have extreme changes from highs (overly happy, excited) to lows (sad, depressed) in your mood. It is different from the normal ups and downs that everybody goes through.

The symptoms of bipolar disorder can cause problems at work, school, and with relationships. If left untreated, bipolar disorder can even lead to suicide.

The good news is bipolar disorder can be treated. Many people with bipolar disorder lead full and productive lives.

## **Who gets bipolar disorder?**

About 1 in 100 people have bipolar disorder. It usually begins in adolescence (teenage years) or early adulthood. Sometimes, it is not diagnosed until later. Bipolar disorder affects an equal number of men and women.

## **What causes bipolar disorder?**

The exact cause of bipolar disorder is not known. Likely, there is more than one reason why someone gets bipolar disorder. These reasons include:

- **A history of bipolar disorder in your family**  
Bipolar disorder can run in families. If members of your family have bipolar disorder, you have a higher chance of getting it.
- **Changes in your brain chemicals**  
Changes in the levels of your brain chemicals (biochemistry) may lead to bipolar disorder.
- **Environment**  
For example, a lot of stress, not enough sleep, or the use of drugs and alcohol can cause symptoms for people already at risk.

## What are the signs of bipolar disorder?

A person with bipolar disorder has extreme changes in mood. Their mood changes from **mania** (highs) to **depression** (lows). Often there are periods of normal mood in between.

Periods of mania can last several days to months. Periods of depression can last several weeks to months. These symptoms are a change from the person's normal behaviour.

### Symptoms of mania can include:

- feeling overly happy
- lots of energy and feeling restless
- having too many ideas too fast
- talking more than usual or very quickly
- not feeling tired and less need for sleep
- increased sex drive
- trouble concentrating
- making bad decisions and acting without thinking, for example:
  - spending a lot of money
  - careless driving
  - using more drugs and/or alcohol
  - getting into fights
  - making bad decisions about money
- believing you can do more than you are able, for example believing you can fly or are stronger and smarter than everyone else

## **Symptoms of depression can include:**

- feeling sad, empty or hopeless
- loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- weight loss or weight gain
- sleeping too little or sleeping too much
- low energy or feeling tired
- feeling worthless and/or guilty
- trouble concentrating or making decisions
- thoughts about death or suicide

## **What treatments will help?**

Once it is diagnosed, bipolar disorder can be treated. Ongoing treatment is needed because the symptoms of bipolar disorder will keep coming back.

Two types of treatment are used to help bipolar disorder:

### **1. Medicines**

Medicine is a common and important part of treatment. Many different kinds of medicines are used. You and your doctor may have to try several medicines before you find the one that works for you.

### **2. Psychosocial treatment**

Psychosocial treatments don't involve medicine. Different kinds of health professionals or support groups teach you how to manage your bipolar disorder. For example, they can help you:

- learn about your illness
- learn skills for how to deal with it
- learn how to manage your stress

Most times, both types of treatment are used together. Medicines are usually started first to get your symptoms under control.

## What are some resources in my community?

**The Mood Disorder Association of Ontario (MDAO)** can help people across Ontario who have depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. They offer free support and recovery programs.

Phone number: 416 486 8046

Website: [www.mooddisorders.ca](http://www.mooddisorders.ca)

**If you are having thoughts of harming yourself at any time, please call the Distress Centre Helpline 416-408-HELP (4357) or visit your closest emergency department.**



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