

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder affects all types of people

If you have bipolar disorder, you're not alone. In the United States, estimates suggest about 8 million American adults may be affected by this serious mental illness. Bipolar disorder impacts both men and women of all ethnic groups. While this illness can cause extreme mood swings, most people with bipolar disorder spend more time in the depressive phase than the manic or hypomanic phase when they are ill or symptomatic (in other words, when they are symptomatic, they experience more "lows"—or bipolar depression—than "highs").

Bipolar disorder can be missed as a diagnosis because the symptoms of bipolar depression—the phase that people with the illness tend to spend most of their time in when they are ill—are similar to those of other types of depression.

However, to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder a person must have experienced at least one high period (mania or hypomania) as well. Be sure to give your doctor an accurate description of all your experiences and symptoms. This can help ensure you have an accurate diagnosis and are getting the appropriate treatment for your symptoms.

Bipolar depression facts

Extreme lows, or bipolar depression, can be so overwhelming that it can take the joy out of life. You may lose interest in things and activities you once enjoyed. You may feel extremely sad, worthless, or guilty. You may also appear restless or have trouble thinking. Bipolar depression will not just go away on its own; left untreated, it can lead to thoughts of death and suicide. But with treatment, for many people, bipolar depression symptoms can be managed, just as the symptoms of other chronic illnesses—such as asthma or high blood pressure—can be managed.

Bipolar mania facts

Bipolar mania is an "extreme high" mood. During a manic high, people feel unusually euphoric. It's common to be overly talkative, have lots of energy, and need little sleep. Some people experience extreme irritability or an increased sex drive, or engage in provocative or intrusive behavior.

Bipolar depression or major depressive disorder?

Many people with bipolar disorder initially seek treatment for their depressive symptoms rather than for their manic symptoms. Unfortunately, the diagnosis of bipolar disorder is oftentimes missed, since it's the manic or hypomanic episodes that differentiate bipolar disorder from major depressive disorder. In a national survey, over one-third of people with bipolar disorder who were originally misdiagnosed waited 10 years or more before receiving an accurate diagnosis. And more than two-thirds of people with bipolar disorder were originally misdiagnosed with other disorders.

The consequences of an inaccurate or delayed diagnosis can be significant. For example, treatment with antidepressants alone, such as SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) or SNRIs (serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors), can trigger a manic episode. And delayed proper treatment for bipolar disorder can mean future episodes, and marital, work, and financial problems.

For more information about depression, click on the following website:

http://helpguide.org/mental/bipolar_disorder_symptoms_treatment.htm