



Mental Health Comprehensive Services

Providing Family Stability and Developing Life Coping Skills

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder (BD) is a type of mood disorder. Bipolar disorder was called manic depression in the past, and that term is still used by some people. It is a psychiatric illness that causes major disruptions in lifestyle and health.

- Everyone has occasional highs and lows in their moods. But people with bipolar disorder have extreme mood swings. They can go from feeling very sad, despairing, helpless, worthless, and hopeless (depression) to feeling as if they are on top of the world, hyperactive, creative, and grandiose (mania). This disease is called bipolar disorder because the mood of a person with bipolar disorder can alternate between two completely opposite poles, euphoric happiness and extreme sadness.
- Symptoms of both mania and depression sometimes occur together, in what is called "mixed state."
- The extremes of mood usually occur in cycles. In between these mood swings, people with bipolar disorder are able to function normally, hold a job, and have a normal family life. The episodes of mood swings tend to become closer together with age.
- When a person is in the grip of this disease, chaos can occur. Bipolar disorder can cause major disruption of family and finances, loss of job, and marital problems.
- Severe depression can be life-threatening. It may be associated with thoughts of suicide, actual acts of suicide, and even acts of homicide in some cases.
- Extreme mania can lead to aggressive behavior, potentially dangerous risk-taking behaviors, and homicidal acts.
- A number of people with bipolar disorder may turn to drugs and alcohol to "self-treat" their emotional disorder, resulting in substance abuse and dependence.

Most people start showing signs of bipolar disorder in their late teens (the average age of onset is 21 years). These signs may be dismissed as "growing pains" or normal teenage behavior. On occasion, some people have their first symptoms during childhood, but the condition can often be misdiagnosed at this age and improperly labeled as a behavioral problem. Bipolar disorder may not be properly diagnosed until the sufferer is 25-40 years old, at which time the pattern of symptoms may become clearer.

Bipolar disorder occurs in both men and women. About 5.7 million people in the United States have the disorder. There is no racial group that is more afflicted by this disease. Because of the extreme and risky behavior that goes with bipolar disorder, it is very important that the disorder be identified. With proper and early diagnosis, this mental condition can be treated. Bipolar disorder is a long-term illness that will require proper management for the duration of a person's life.

For more information about this article on Bipolar Disorder go to http://www.emedicinehealth.com/bipolar_disorder/article_em.htm.