

Bipolar Disorder

There is a tendency to romanticize bipolar disorder. Many artists, musicians and writers have suffered from its mood swings. But in truth, many lives are ruined by this disease; and without effective treatment, the illness is associated with an increased risk of suicide.¹

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a serious brain disease that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and functioning. It affects approximately 2.3 million adult Americans—about 1.2 percent of the population.² Men and women are equally likely to develop this disabling illness. The disorder typically emerges in adolescence or early adulthood, but in some cases appears in **childhood**.³ Cycles, or episodes, of depression, mania, or "mixed" manic and depressive symptoms typically recur and may become more frequent, often disrupting work, school, family, and social life.

Depression: Symptoms include a persistent sad mood; loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed; significant change in appetite or body weight; difficulty sleeping or oversleeping; physical slowing or agitation; loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt; difficulty thinking or concentrating; and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Mania: Abnormally and persistently elevated (high) mood or irritability accompanied by at least three of the following symptoms: overly-inflated self-esteem; decreased need for sleep; increased talkativeness; racing thoughts; distractibility; increased goal-directed activity such as shopping; physical agitation; and excessive involvement in risky behaviors or activities.

"Mixed" state: Symptoms of mania and depression are present at the same time. The symptom picture frequently includes agitation, trouble sleeping, significant change in appetite, psychosis, and suicidal thinking. Depressed mood accompanies manic activation.

Especially early in the course of illness, the episodes may be separated by periods of wellness during which a person suffers few to no symptoms. When 4 or more episodes of illness occur within a 12-month period, the person is said to have bipolar disorder with *rapid cycling*. Bipolar disorder is often complicated by co-occurring alcohol or substance abuse.⁴

Severe depression or mania may be accompanied by symptoms of *psychosis*. These symptoms include: hallucinations (hearing, seeing, or otherwise sensing the presence of stimuli that are not there) and delusions (false personal beliefs that are not subject to reason or contradictory evidence and are not explained by a person's cultural concepts). Psychotic symptoms associated with bipolar typically reflect the extreme mood state at the time.

Treatments