

# Bipolar Disorder

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Bipolar robs you of that which is you. It can take from you the very core of your being and replace it with something that is completely opposite of who and what you truly are. Because my bipolar went untreated for so long, I spent many years looking in the mirror and seeing a person I did not recognize or understand.

## What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a serious brain illness. It is also called manic-depressive illness or manic depression. People with bipolar disorder go through unusual mood changes. Sometimes they feel very happy and sometimes they feel very sad. These are called manic and depressive episode simultaneously.

This disorder is not same as normal ups and downs which almost everyone in the world goes through. The mood swings in the case of bipolar disorder are much more severe such that there are visible changes in sleep pattern, energy level, and ability to think clearly. These symptoms can break relationship; make it tough for continuing job or school, self-destructing or suicidal, etc.

People with bipolar disorder can get symptomatic treatment due to which they can lead a normal and successful life.

## Who develops bipolar disorder?

Anyone can develop bipolar disorder. It often starts in a person's late teen or early adult years. But children and older adults can have bipolar disorder too. The illness usually lasts a lifetime.

## What are the causes of bipolar disorder?

Doctors do not know what causes bipolar disorder, but several things may contribute to the illness. Family genes, brain structure or the improper brain function of the person can be some of the causes for the onset of this disorder. There are many researches happening across the world to help doctors do a better job of treating Bipolar affected people. The research is also trying to create the prediction mechanism for predicting whether a person will get bipolar disorder or not.

## What are the symptoms of bipolar disorder?

Bipolar “mood episodes” include unusual mood changes along with unusual sleep habits, activity levels, thoughts, or behavior. In an adult, these mood and activity changes must be very different from their usual behavior and from the behavior of other normal adults. A person with bipolar disorder may have manic episodes, depressive episodes, or “mixed” episodes.

Adults having a manic episode may show following symptoms:

- Feel very happy or act silly in a way that’s unusual for them
- Have a very short temper
- Talk really fast about a lot of different things
- Have trouble sleeping but not feel tired
- Have trouble staying focused

Adults having a depressive episode may:

- Feel very sad
- Complain about pain a lot, such as stomachaches and headaches
- Sleep too little or too much
- Feel guilty and worthless
- Eat too little or too much

## Can someone have bipolar disorder along with other problems?

Yes. Sometimes people having very strong mood episodes may have psychotic symptoms. Psychosis affects thoughts and emotions as well as a person’s ability to know what is real and what is not. People with mania and psychotic symptoms may believe they are rich and famous, or have special powers. People with depression and psychotic symptoms may believe they have committed a crime, they have lost all of their money, or that their lives are ruined in some other way.

Sometimes behavior problems go along with mood episodes. A person may drink too much or take drugs. Some people take a lot of risks, like spending too much money or having reckless sex. These problems can damage lives and hurt relationships. Some people with bipolar disorder have trouble keeping a job or doing well in school.

## How is bipolar disorder treated?

Right now, there is no cure for bipolar disorder, but treatment can help control symptoms. Most people can get help for mood changes and behavior problems. Steady, dependable treatment works better than treatment that starts and stops. Treatment options include:

- **Medication.** There are several types of medication that can help.
- **Therapy.** Different kinds of psychotherapy, or “talk” therapy, can help people with bipolar disorder.
- **Other treatments.** Some people do not get desired outcome from medication and therapy. They can try electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). This therapy is sometimes known as shock therapy.
- There are few **herbal and natural supplements** as well, such as St. John’s Wort or Omega-3 fatty acids. But you should talk to your doctor before taking any supplement.

## Getting Help

Here are the options by which you can get help:

1. Call your family doctor.
2. Check the phone book for mental health professionals.
3. Hospital doctors can help in an emergency.
4. Use the online tool available on <http://www.depression-guide.com/> for finding treatment centers.

## I know someone who is in crisis. What do I do?

If you know someone who might hurt himself or herself, or if you’re thinking about hurting yourself, get help quickly. Here are some things you can do:

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Call your doctor.
- Call 911 or go to the emergency room.
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, toll-free: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The TTY number is 1-800-799-4TTY (4889).