

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is an illness that causes a person have dramatic mood changes. Such changes can range from being overly "high" and irritable, to sad and hopeless, with normal moods in between.

It usually occurs as early as age 20, and sometimes in early adolescence. Once it occurs, it frequently or usually continues throughout a person's life. Onset of the illness after age 60 is rare.

Almost 2 million Americans suffer from the disorder, which seems to run in families and is believed to be inherited.

It is one of the most common and most treatable of the mental illnesses.

Causes

There is no known cause of Bipolar Disorder.

Signs and Symptoms

When experiencing an overly "high" feeling, the person may have:

- Unusual behavior for a period of two weeks or more
- Increased energy and activity, racing thoughts and rapid talking
- A decreased need for sleep
- Increased sexual drive
- Unrealistic beliefs in own powers and abilities
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol and sleeping medications
- Denial that anything is wrong
- Extreme irritability
- Extremely intrusive, offensive behavior

When experiencing sad and hopeless feelings, the person may have:

- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- No interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex
- A decreased energy level; a feeling of being slowed down



Bipolar Disorder

- Difficulty in concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Sleep disturbances
- A loss of appetite and weight, or weight gain
- A persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Restlessness or irritability
- Feelings of hopelessness or gloom

Treatment

Most people with Bipolar Disorder can be helped. Medications are available to help with both the overly "high" and sad and hopeless feelings. Other treatments include electroconvulsive therapy and psychotherapy.

Anyone with Bipolar Disorder should be under the care of a physician, preferably a psychiatrist, who is skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of this illness. It is important to realize that Bipolar Disorder will not go away, and treatment is needed to keep it under control.

Family and friends can help by encouraging a person with the illness to seek and remain in treatment programs.

Source: Information taken from National Institute of Mental Health materials.