

A Look at Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is an illness that is as old as mankind itself. It has likely been conserved and perpetuated due to the significant amount of energy it generates and the originality of thought that it causes. Oddly enough, many manic-depressives have literally changed the course of human history. Manic-depression has afflicted and likely fueled the brilliance of such outstanding people as Isaac Newton, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Ludwig von Beethoven, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Wolf, Johann Goethe and Anne Sexton among others.

The Manic Phase

In the manic phase, the person experiences an increased rate of thinking, will have surges of energy, and will often describe themselves as feeling more active, creative, intelligent, and sexual. The individual often reports that these feelings are in excess of anything that they ever thought they might experience. The need for sleep diminishes as the individual finds themselves experiencing one thought after another in rapid onset. The individual begins to develop the expectation that he or she will actually be able to successfully execute all of the ideas that are flowing effortlessly through their mind. Little consideration is given to the feasibility of these thoughts, with the manic individual often expressing the sense that they can accomplish that which is clearly impossible or highly unlikely. This can be a time of intense creativity.

Unfortunately, this phase does not last. A person who is experiencing the "highs" of the manic phase can also make reckless decisions. These commonly include buying sprees, the committing of sexual indiscretions, making impossible long-term commitments such as purchasing a car or making some other major financial decision clearly beyond the scope of their fiscal resources. Often the individual brings financial ruin upon themselves and their family.

The Depressive Phase

Usually, after the manic energy is expended, the individual plummets into the depths of depression. The depressive features are classic such as:

1. A consistently depressed mood that is largely unchanged or altered over time. The mood is not alleviated by activities or that would normally bring about some degree of relief.
2. A markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities of the day. Activities that were considered enjoyable or pleasurable hold little or no interest.
3. Significant weight loss or weight gain. Eating patterns shift, often resulting in a loss of appetite or excessive eating.
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia. Sleeping patterns tend to involve little sleep with the individual awakening frequently throughout the night, or sleeping for extended and abnormally long periods of time.
5. Psychomotor agitation where the individual experiences slower than usual physical reactions. Fine motor skills may also be compromised or diminished.
6. Fatigue or loss of energy. Sleep, relaxation or other interventions do little to increase energy level.
7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt.
8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate. Thoughts are often more fragmented and random.
9. Recurrent thoughts of death.

In addition, a depressed individual may feel inordinate amounts of guilt. Some will become irritable, anxious and hopeless. Depressed individuals often feel that they deserve only punishment and can become focused and fixed on all the small mistakes they have made in their lives

– losing any sense of past accomplishments. In cases of severe depression, the individual's thinking can become delusional and psychotic.

Types of Bipolar

Individuals who experience periods of depression alternating with intense or psychotic manias are referred to as having the Bipolar I form of the disorder. Those individuals who suffer periods of depression and experience only hypomanic episodes (they never get psychotic or lose total control) are referred to as being Bipolar II. Most of the adults who experience Bipolar will have well intervals in between the periods of heightened or lowered mood.

Mood Swings

Quite often mood swings occur without an identifiable cause. Rapid cyclers will experience frequent mood swings, in more extreme cases experiencing mood swings hourly. Others may cycle much more slowly. Some individuals with Bipolar will swing seasonally, as the days shorten or lengthen, and the weather changes.

What You Can Do

Diet, exercise, therapy and medications can prove effective in more fully managing bipolar disorder. See a mental health professional for diagnosis and a plan to more effectively deal with Bipolar.

This information is presented for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for informed medical advice or training. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a mental health problem without consulting a qualified health or mental health care provider.

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HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU WOULD BENEFIT FROM COUNSELING?

These conditions or situations are widely experienced and may indicate the need for professional counseling:

- Depression, discouragement
- Lack of motivation, apathy
- Anger, bitterness, resentment
- General dissatisfaction with life or relationships
- Difficulties in handling life events
- Marriage and family conflicts
- Sexual dysfunction
- Difficulties in decision making
- Physical ailments for which no medical cause can be found, such as headaches and lower back pain. (Medical consultation may be required in conjunction with therapy.)
- Difficulty in building and maintaining satisfying relationships
- Job stress, inability to keep jobs
- Inability to deal with a child's misbehavior or school problems
- Compulsive behaviors (eating disorders, spending, sexual issues)
- Issues related to low self-esteem or lack of self-worth
- Excessive dependence upon the approval or validation of others

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