

# Understanding Bipolar Disorder



Bipolar disorder is a serious disorder of the brain. It may severely disrupt your life. At times, it may cause you and your loved ones great pain. But there is hope. Although there is no cure, treatment can help control your symptoms. Talk with your healthcare provider or a mental health professional. They can offer guidance and support.



## What causes bipolar disorder?

The exact causes of bipolar disorder aren't known. It is known that the disease runs in families. Genes that affect nerve cells in the brain may be inherited, but as yet these genes have not been found.

## Who does it affect?

Over 5 million adults in this country have bipolar disorder. Most often, it strikes young adults. It can affect children and older adults as well. Bipolar disorder affects both men and women. It can strike people of all races, cultures, and incomes.

## Ups and downs

Bipolar disorder used to be called manic-depressive illness. That is because it causes extreme mood swings. At times the person may feel almost too happy. These times are often followed by great despair. In some cases, both extremes may occur at once. More often, moods shift back and forth. These mood swings may occur just once in a while. Or they may happen 4 or more times a year. Without treatment, they will likely recur throughout life.

## Manic episodes

During manic episodes of bipolar disorder, you feel like you're on top of the world. Even the worst news can't seem to bring you down. You'll likely feel as if you can do anything. And sometimes you may try. You may take great risks, thinking you can't be hurt. The risks can involve dangerous physical, emotional, and financial decisions. You may also talk too fast, and your thoughts may race. You may go for days without sleeping. And you might be very active and do a lot of things in a short time. Manic episodes often end in a depression.

## Depressive episodes

In depressive episodes, you feel intense, overwhelming sadness and depression. You may also feel worthless, tired, and helpless. Even the things you value most don't give you pleasure. At times you may want to die. You may even think about taking your own life.

## Warning signs for suicide

- Thinking often about taking your life
- Planning how you may attempt it
- Talking or writing about committing suicide
- Feeling that death is the only solution to your problems
- Feeling a pressing need to make out your will or arrange your funeral
- Giving away things you own
- Participating in risky behaviors, such as sex with someone you don't know or drinking and driving
- Buying a lethal weapon, such as a gun, or hoarding medicines that could be used in an overdose

## Call 988

If you notice any of the warning signs for suicide, get help right away. Call or text 988. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

## How daily issues affect your health

Many things in your daily life impact your health. This can include transportation, money problems, housing, access to food, and childcare. If you can't get to medical appointments, you may not receive the care you need. When money is tight, it may be difficult to pay for medicines. And living far from a grocery store can make it hard to buy healthy food.

If you have concerns in any of these or other areas, talk with your healthcare team. They may know of local resources to assist you. Or they may have a staff person who can help.

## To learn more

For more information, use the resources below:

- [National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov) or 866-615-6464
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org) or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). In a crisis, call or text 988.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness at www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) or 800-950-6264
- [Mental Health America at www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org) or 800-969-6642

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