

Treatments for Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a mental illness which causes mood swings and mood cycling. Mood cycling refers to the transition between mania and depression. Mania, or manic episodes, typically consist of feelings of elation and invincibility, and cause disorientation, lack of sleep, and obsessive behaviors. Depression typically consists of feelings of overwhelming sadness and low self worth.

There are many treatments available for bipolar disorder, ranging from medications to therapy. There are too many medications to be discussed here in depth. There are also many forms therapy can take, and techniques that can be learned to assist the patient in gaining some control over their bipolar disorder.

Typically, bipolar disorder is treated with more than one medication. This is due to the dual nature of bipolar disorder. Most patients need at least two medications: one to control depression and one to control mania. The combination of these two types of medication works to obtain balance in moods and stop mood cycling. Often, a third medication, called a mood stabilizer, is also prescribed. The most common mood stabilizer is Topomax.

Popular medications for treatment of mania in bipolar patients include lithium, valproate (Depakote), carbamazepine (Tegretol), olanzapine (Zyprexa), and ziprasidone (Geodon). Lithium has long been considered the miracle drug of bipolar disorder. It is a sodium based medication that helps to balance the chemical imbalance in the brain that causes manic episodes in bipolar patients.

Valproate, or Depakote, was originally developed as a seizure medication. However, its effects on bipolar patients who have rapid cycling bipolar (moods that cycle every few hours or days rather than weeks or months), it has been quite effective. Carbamazepine, or Tegretol, is another anti-seizure medication. While it appears to have similar effects on bipolar disorder as Depakote, it has not yet been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use as a bipolar disorder treatment.

Olanzapine, or Zyprexa, and Ziprasidone, or Geodon, are both anti-psychotic drugs, and are particularly effective for treatment of bipolar disorder in which mania becomes so severe that psychotic symptoms are present.

Medications for treatment of depression are called anti-depressants. Common anti-depressants include citalopram (Celexa), escitalopram (Lexapro), fluoxetine (Prozac), paroxetine (Paxil), and sertraline (Zoloft). All of these medications

have been proven to be successful treatments for depression, although Celexa and Prozac are the most commonly prescribed.

Typically, treatment of bipolar disorder includes a combination of medications and therapy, or counseling. However, in some cases, medication may not be necessary for milder cases of bipolar disorder. In other cases, medication may not be desired by the patient, and the patient may wish to seek out other alternatives to medication for treatment of their bipolar disorder.

For these patients, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be quite effective. CBT is a method of bipolar disorder treatment that involves teaching the patient techniques to recognize triggers and symptoms of their mood cycling, and use that information and recognition to prevent the triggers from occurring, or the mood cycling from being quite as severe. Most of these techniques require the patient to develop cognitive thinking skills as well as critical thinking and problem solving capabilities. If the bipolar disorder is severe to the point that the patient is unable to engage in these thinking abilities and skills, CBT may not be a viable form of treatment in and of itself.

Overall, there are many treatments available for bipolar disorder. There are many options for the patient that can be discussed with the patient's doctors. If a patient is not satisfied with the form their treatment is taking, they should discuss it with their doctor, and not be afraid to change doctors in order to change treatment methods. All in all, effective and successful treatment of bipolar disorder rests in the hands of the patient.