

## Treatments for Bipolar Disorder: Getting Rid of that Monkey on your Back

It is a common occurrence that bipolar disorder is undiagnosed in a sufferer for an average of eight years. Individuals afflicted with the disorder do not seek out professional help for at least a decade after the first manifestation of symptoms. Though the disorder can be controlled with proper treatment, there are a lot of people who suffer from the disorder because they are left untreated or are treated inappropriately.

There is a huge population of sufferers that have multiple incidences and it is quite uncommon for them to have a sole episode of depression or hypomania in bipolar disorder in a lifespan. The duration of the symptom-free periods increase with the advancement of age. The existence of major symptoms may well forecast long-term psychosocial dysfunction. The danger of a relapse is high in patients with mood-incongruent psychotic symptoms.

The disorder, being untreated, can cause a variation of damage in the life of the sufferer. Therefore, it is imperative that the disorder be diagnosed as early as possible and treatment plans be started at an early stage as well.

There are varieties of treatments for Bipolar disorder. Some may fail but some are successful in controlling the disorder. Oftentimes the patients easily give up on their medication thinking that the drugs have failed them when in fact there are drugs that need a certain amount of time before it works. Compliance is also a major factor in the success of a treatment. Any lapse in the medication intake can easily allow a relapse of the disorder.

There are two stages of treatment: the acute and the preventive or maintenance stage. Acute stage treatment is intended to end the present depressive, hypomanic, manic, or mixed mood swing episodes. Preventive or maintenance treatment is for the continuation of the healing process to avoid or control future episodes.

Treatment is composed of medication, psychotherapy, and education. Medication is important for almost all patients throughout the acute and preventive stages. Psychotherapy aids both patients and their families in dealing with the more than the usual bipolar behavior of the patients. Education is also very helpful to patients and their families as they become more aware of the complexities of the disorder as well as how to manage it.

In any case, all treatments aim to decrease the incidence of episodes, prevent cycling from one mood stage to another, decrease and treat the intensity of acute mood episodes of depression or mania, and aid the patient as much as possible in between mood episodes.

Before any treatment is prescribed, the physician will first identify what had caused the episode and will assess the patient for any other emotional or medical predicaments that could get in the way of the treatment.

The following are medications and other treatments used to help individuals suffering from bipolar disorder:

? Mood stabilizers are the core medication treatment for bipolar disorder. These medications are efficient for short-term or acute episodes of depression and psychotic mania. It is also used for maintenance treatment. Lithium and valproate are mood stabilizers that are commonly prescribed. These two drugs act to stimulate the liberation of glutamate (a neurotransmitter).

? Atypical Antipsychotic drugs are prescribed treat schizophrenia. This drug also has mood stabilizing characteristics which is helpful in the treatment of bipolar disorder. Olanzapine, risperidone, quetiapine, ziprasidone, and aripiprazole are the five standard medications for the bipolar mania and mixed episodes. Quetiapine is only utilized for the treatment of mixed episodes. These drugs may be used single-handedly or can be combined with mood stabilizers such as lithium or valproate. Furthermore, a blend fluoxetine and olanzapine is also accepted for bipolar depression treatment.

? Antiseizure medications are also utilized for the treatment of patients suffering from rapid-cycling and mixed episodes, mania, and for those who have suffered the consequences of substance abuse. Carbamazepine, lamotrigine, oxcarbazepine are the antiseizure medications usually used in helping patients suffering bipolar II disorder and rapid cycling.

? Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is also an efficient treatment. This is ordered for patients suffering acute emotional stages or may also be utilized for maintenance.

? Sleep Management and Psychotherapy in combination with bipolar medications are also highly helpful in the treatment plan for bipolar disorder.

Consequences of medications may include increase occurrence of diabetes, high cholesterol, and weight gain. To diminish such risks, the patient is instructed

to have a dietary intake that will include whole grains, foods that are low in saturated fats, foods low in sugar, fruits, and vegetables. These can help decrease the incidence of gaining weight, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

With vigilance and discipline in addition to a strong support of family and friends the individual who is suffering from bipolar disorder may well sail through without much difficulty during troubled times.