

Bipolar Disorder

1. What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes disturbances in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. The severe mood swings that occur generally last for weeks to months at a time, and can result in significant disability through damaged relationships, difficulty with employment, and significant risk of harm because of reckless or impulsive behaviour.

2. What causes Bipolar Disorder?

Anyone can develop bipolar disorder, but it is most common among people between the ages of 18 and 35. About 1 in a 100 people develop BPAD at some stage during their lives, and it is as common in men as in women.

The exact cause of why some people develop bipolar disorder is not known. However, there are several important factors which are known to play a part in causing the illness.

Bipolar disorder can be inherited such that people whose parents have bipolar disorder are also more likely to have the illness (although in the majority of cases, children of parents with bipolar do not develop the illness).

People with bipolar have been found to have a disturbance of the chemicals in the brain, which is why the illness can often be controlled with medication.

It is also known that stressful life events may increase the chance of developing bipolar disorder among those who are at risk (e.g. those with a family history of the illness) and stress can also make further episodes of either mania or depression more likely in those who already have developed the disorder

3. What are the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder can cause dramatic mood swings - from a feeling of being elated or uncomfortably irritable, to periods of feeling profoundly sad and hopeless, often with periods of normal moods in between. The periods of highs and lows are called episodes of mania and depression, respectively.

Manic Episode:

Features or symptoms of a manic phase include:

- Elated mood - 'feeling on top of the world' - a sensation of utter happiness
- Excessive irritability, anger or rage - sometimes the elation is not a pleasurable experience, but causes a severe agitation instead
- Increased energy and/or restlessness
- Less need for sleep
- Uncontrollable racing thoughts
- Impulsive, risky behaviour - e.g. excessive spending sprees, foolish business investments or out-of-character sexual behaviour.
- Unrealistic beliefs - such that one is invincible or has special powers.

