



## BIPOLAR DISORDER



**University of Michigan Depression Center**  
4250 Plymouth Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109  
734-764-0231

**For more information about bipolar disorder, including treatments and research, please visit our websites:**

[www.prechterfund.org](http://www.prechterfund.org)

[www.depressioncenter.org](http://www.depressioncenter.org)

[www.depressiontoolkit.org](http://www.depressiontoolkit.org)

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## WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder is an illness caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. People with this illness experience dramatic changes in mood, energy level, and ability to function. Bipolar disorder was previously known as manic depression.

The symptoms of bipolar disorder are often severe and are different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through from time to time.

Bipolar disorder affects both men and women of all cultural and economic backgrounds. Although most people are diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 24, the illness can affect people of any age, including college-aged adults, older adults, and even children.

Bipolar disorder tends to run in families and has a genetic link.

The term bipolar disorder actually refers to two different disorders – bipolar I disorder and bipolar II disorder. Together, they are sometimes referred to as “bipolar spectrum disorders.”

- Bipolar I disorder is characterized by episodes of mania (an extreme elevation of mood) and depression.
- Bipolar II disorder is characterized by episodes of hypomania (a milder form of mood elevation) and depression.

## SYMPTOMS

People with bipolar experience mood swings ranging from “highs” (mania or hypomania) and/or irritability to “lows” (depression).

### *Symptoms of mania*

- Elevated mood
- Feeling irritable
- Increased energy and activity
- Having trouble sleeping, or needing less sleep
- Difficulty concentrating, easily distractible
- Feeling overly self-confident and powerful
- Racing speech or thoughts
- Appetite changes
- Reckless behavior, poor judgment, or impulsiveness, possibly leading to spending sprees, substance abuse, impulsive sex, or high-risk business ventures, for example

### *Symptoms of depression*

- Feeling sad or empty
- Feeling tired or less energetic
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Feelings of hopelessness or guilt
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions
- Withdrawing from people and feeling alone
- Less interest in friends, family, hobbies, or other activities that normally bring pleasure.
- Regular, unexplained aches and pains
- Changes in weight (loss or gain)
- Overeating, OR loss of appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Thoughts of suicide, or suicide attempts

A person may be having an episode of bipolar disorder if he or she has a number of manic or depressive symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, for at least one or two weeks. The mood changes between the highs and lows can be scary and upsetting. Sometimes symptoms are so severe that the person cannot function normally at work, school, or home.

## TREATMENTS

Bipolar disorder can be treated safely and effectively. For many people, the best treatment is a combination of medication and talk therapy. Medications can prevent episodes of either depression or mania. Talk therapy (psychotherapy) is often used along with medications to help patients cope with stressful life experiences that can bring about episodes. Physical exercise and nutrition are valuable tools, and the support of family members, friends, and co-workers is crucial.

Most people with bipolar disorder will need treatment for a long time, often throughout their lives, to continually monitor and adjust medications and manage symptoms.

