

# BIPOLAR DISORDER

## (Manic-Depressive Disorder)

From high to low. From mania to depression. From recklessness to listlessness. These are the extremes associated with bipolar disorder, a mental illness characterized by mood instability that can be serious and disabling. Bipolar disorder is also known as manic-depression or manic-depressive illness — manic behavior is one extreme of this disorder, and depression is the other.

The deep mood swings of bipolar disorder may last for weeks or months, causing great disturbances in the lives of those affected, and those of family and friends, too. Today, a growing volume of research suggests that bipolar disorder occurs across a spectrum of symptoms, and that many people aren't correctly diagnosed. Left untreated, bipolar disorder generally worsens, and the suicide rate is high among those with bipolar disorder. But with effective treatment, you can live an enjoyable and productive life despite bipolar disorder.

## Symptoms

Bipolar disorder symptoms are characterized by an alternating pattern of emotional highs (mania) and lows (depression). The intensity of signs and symptoms can vary from mild to severe. There may even be periods when your life doesn't seem affected at all.

**Bipolar disorder symptoms reflect a range of moods.**

## Manic phase of bipolar disorder

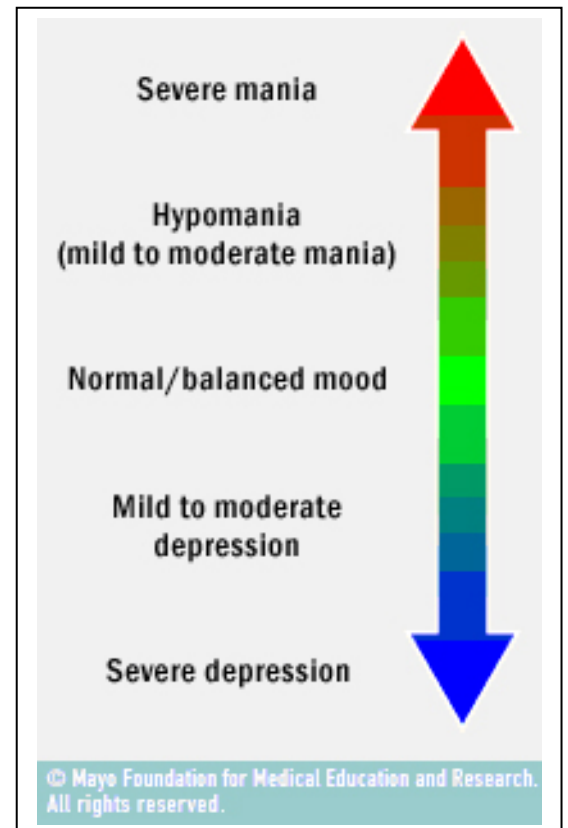
*Signs and symptoms of the manic phase of bipolar disorder may include:*

- Euphoria
- Extreme optimism
- Inflated self-esteem
- Poor judgment
- Rapid speech
- Racing thoughts
- Aggressive behavior
- Agitation
- Increased physical activity
- Risky behavior
- Spending sprees
- Increased drive to perform or achieve goals
- Increased sexual drive
- Decreased need for sleep
- Tendency to be easily distracted
- Inability to concentrate
- Drug abuse

## Depressive phase of bipolar disorder

*Signs and symptoms of the depressive phase of bipolar disorder may include:*

- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts or behavior
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Sleep problems
- Appetite problems
- Fatigue
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Problems concentrating
- Irritability
- Chronic pain without a known cause



## Types of bipolar disorder

*Bipolar disorder is divided into two main subtypes:*

- Bipolar I disorder. You've had at least one manic episode, with or without previous episodes of depression.
- Bipolar II disorder. You've had at least one episode of depression and at least one hypomanic episode. A hypomanic episode is similar to a manic episode but much briefer, lasting only a few days, and not as severe. With hypomania, you may have an elevated mood, irritability and some changes in your functioning, but generally you can carry on with your normal daily routine and functioning, and you don't require hospitalization. In bipolar II disorder, the periods of depression are typically much longer than the periods of hypomania.
- Cyclothymia. Cyclothymia is a mild form of bipolar disorder. Cyclothymia includes mood swings but the highs and lows are not as severe as those of full-blown bipolar disorder.

## Other bipolar disorder symptoms

In addition, some people with bipolar disorder have rapid cycling bipolar disorder. This is the occurrence of four or more mood swings within 12 months. These mood shifts can occur rapidly, sometimes within just hours. In mixed state bipolar disorder, symptoms of both mania and depression occur at the same time.

Severe episodes of either mania or depression may result in psychosis, or a detachment from reality. Symptoms of psychosis may include hearing or seeing things that aren't there (hallucinations) and false but strongly held beliefs (delusions).

## Causes

*It's not known what causes bipolar disorder. But a variety of biochemical, genetic and environmental factors seem to be involved in causing and triggering bipolar episodes:*

- Biochemical. Some evidence from high-tech imaging studies indicates that people with bipolar disorder have physical changes in their brains. The significance of these changes is still uncertain but may eventually help pinpoint causes. The naturally occurring brain chemicals called neurotransmitters, which are tied to mood, also may play a role. Hormonal imbalances also are thought to be a culprit.
- Genes. Some studies show that bipolar disorder is more common in people whose biological family members also have the condition. Researchers are trying to find genes that may be involved in causing bipolar disorder. Some studies also show links between bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, pointing to a shared genetic cause.
- Environment. Environment also is thought to play a causal role in some way. Some studies of identical twins show that one twin has the condition while the other doesn't — which means genes alone aren't responsible for bipolar disorder. Environmental causes may include problems with self-esteem, significant loss or high stress.

## Coping and support

*By Mayo Clinic staff*

Coping with bipolar disorder can be difficult. Medications can have unwanted side effects, and you may feel angry or resentful about having a serious condition that requires lifelong treatment. During periods when you feel better, you may be tempted to stop treatment. **Here are some ways to cope with bipolar disorder:**

- Learn about bipolar disorder. Education about your condition can empower you and motivate you to stick to your treatment plan.
- Join a support group. Support groups for people with bipolar disorder can help you reach out to others facing similar challenges.
- Stay focused on your goals. Recovery from bipolar disorder can take time. Stay motivated by keeping your recovery goals in mind and reminding yourself that you can work to repair damaged relationships and financial and legal problems.
- Find healthy outlets. Explore healthy ways to channel your energy, such as hobbies, exercise and recreational activities.
- Learn relaxation and stress management. Try such stress reduction techniques.