

Mood Swings Characterize Bipolar Disorder

Disease usually begins during adolescence

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), bipolar disorder is a severe brain disorder characterized by extreme changes in mood, thought and behavior.

Dr. Rajnish Mago, director of the mood disorders program at Thomas Jefferson University and professor of psychiatry and human behavior at the Sidney Kimmel Medical College in Philadelphia, Pa., says the main characteristic of bipolar disorder is fear lasting for a day, a week or a month. This then goes into mania, marked by highs and elevated moods, alternating with episodes in which the patient battles a low, depressed mood and fatigue.

Bipolar disorder affects nearly 6 million adult Americans. The condition tends to run in families and generally affects spouses, parents, family members and friends or co-workers.

Bipolar disorder usually begins in late adolescence, often appearing as depression during the teen years. The mood episodes are quite intense; strong feelings occur along with changes in behavior and energy levels.

According to the NIH, during a manic episode, a person may:

- feel very "up" or "high";
 - feel jumpy or wired;
 - talk fast about many different things;
 - be agitated, irritable or touchy;
 - have trouble relaxing and sleeping;
 - think they can do many different things at once and are more active than usual; or
 - do risky things, like spending a lot of money or having reckless sex.
- The NIH says while in a depressive episode, a person may:
- feel very down or sad;

- feel worried and empty;
- have trouble concentrating;
- lose interest in fun activities;
- feel tired or slowed down; and
- think about death or suicide.

Sometimes when a person is manic and has psychotic symptoms (out of touch with reality), he may believe he is rich and famous. Then, when he is depressed and psychotic, he may think he is a criminal and has done bad things.

Bipolar disease is not easy to diagnose. Individuals may live for years with it before it comes to light. Also, a person with bipolar disease may have other problems, such as substance abuse issues or anxiety disorder.

Bipolar disease is treated with medication that usually includes mood stabilizers, such as the classic lithium, anti-depressants and often antipsychotic medications. The newer anti-

psychotic medications have properties of mood stabilization that benefit the bipolar condition. Psychotherapy is sometimes offered. Other treatments such as electroshock therapy are used when the patient can't tolerate drug therapy. For many people, faith plays a vital part in living with bipolar disease. Some say their faith helps them deal with the severity of the illness as well as the problems it brings.

An important factor in care is having a mental health counselor the person trusts and relates to easily. Sometimes there is a team approach, but the patient needs to select the team carefully and feel he/she is a part of that team.

Other tips for care include:

- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Get enough rest, eat a healthy diet and exercise as often as possible.
- Pay attention to warning signs and get help if necessary.
- Take your prescribed medication as directed.

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