

Mental Health Carers Service Information & Advice Sheets

Bipolar Disorder [Manic Depressive Illness]

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. Different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through, the symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. They can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance and even suicide. But there is good news; bipolar disorder can be treated, and people with this illness can lead full and productive lives.

Episodes of mania and depression typically recur across the life span. Between episodes, most people with bipolar disorder are free of symptoms, but as many as one-third of people have some residual symptoms. A small percentage of people experience chronic unremitting symptoms despite treatment.

Treatment

Most people with Bipolar disorder - even those with the most severe forms - can achieve substantial stabilisation of their mood swings and related symptoms with proper treatment. Because Bipolar is a recurrent illness, long-term preventative treatment is strongly recommended and almost always indicated. A care plan that combines medication and psychosocial treatment is best for managing the disorder over time.

People with bipolar disorder can be prescribed a number of medications. A combination of anti-psychotics, antidepressants and mood stabilisers is usually prescribed in both the treatment and prevention of Bipolar disorder. Anti-psychotics are especially good for reducing manic episodes while antidepressants are used primarily during depressive episodes.

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Bipolar Disorder Treatment continued...

Mood stabilisers help reduce both manic and depressive episodes and are usually taken continuously as a preventative measure.

As an addition to medication, psychosocial treatments - including certain types of talking therapy - are helpful in providing support, education, and guidance to people with bipolar disorder and their families. Studies have shown that psychosocial interventions can lead to increased mood stability, fewer admissions to hospital , and improved functioning in several areas .