



MOOD DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA INC.

PROVINCIAL OFFICE: 100-4 FORT STREET WINNIPEG MANITOBA R3C 1C4
PHONE: (204) 786-0987 TOLL FREE (OUTSIDE OF WINNIPEG) 1 (800) 263-1460 FAX: (204) 775-3497
WEB: depression.mb.ca E-MAIL: sdmdm@depression.mb.ca

Bipolar Affective Disorder

(Manic-Depression)

What is Bipolar Affective Disorder?

Bipolar Affective Disorder, or Manic-Depression, is a disturbance of mood that is characterized by cycles of both depression and mania. A person with Bipolar Disorder may experience mood swings that can occur both gradually and occasionally with rapidity. During the depressed cycle, a person may experience some or all of the symptoms of depression. Symptoms of mania can affect judgment, thinking, and behaviour, leading to potential problems. There are a number of forms of bipolar disorder, depending on severity and duration.

Possible symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

Depression

- Feelings of overwhelming sadness, hopelessness, anxiety
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and low self-esteem
- An inability to feel anything at all
- Restlessness, irritability
- Low energy levels, fatigue, difficulty getting out of bed
- Loss of interest in things once enjoyed
- Changes in sleep patterns and/or appetite
- Thinking or memory impairment, poor concentration, difficulty making decisions
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs
- Decreased sexual drive
- Thoughts of death, suicide, hurting oneself

Mania

- Increased physical and mental activity
- Increased irritability and agitation
- Reckless, impulsive spending
- Rapid, unpredictable emotional changes
- Exaggerated optimism, self-confidence
- Excessive interest in activities
- Feelings of grandiosity, inflated self-esteem
- Overreaction to stimuli
- Decreased need for sleep
- Racing thoughts and speech, flight of ideas
- Sexual indiscretions
- Poor judgment, loss of touch with reality, hallucinations
- Argumentative, explosive, hostile
- Inability to recognize the seriousness of the illness
- Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs

What causes Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar Disorder affects approximately 1.5% of all people. In Canada, more than 450,000 people have, or will have this disorder. Although a single cause has not been identified, it is known that many factors, including biochemical, genetics, and environment play a part in this illness.

Research suggests that an improper balance of neurotransmitters in the brain is related to the symptoms and episodes of depression and mania. The biochemical imbalance may represent a genetic vulnerability set into motion by prolonged stress, trauma, physical illness, or some other environmental factor. Medications may work by correcting the imbalance. There is growing evidence that heredity is involved, especially in the more recurrent forms of the disorder. The exact mechanism by which Bipolar Disorder is transmitted from one generation to the next is not known.

Treatment for Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is usually treated with a variety of medications together with supportive psychotherapy. The most common medications are mood stabilizers such as Lithium, Divalproex, and Carbamazepine. Medications prescribed for this disorder may also include antidepressants, anti-psychotics, and anti-anxiety agents. Since Bipolar Disorder is a recurrent illness, often with widely separated episodes over many years, medications may have to be taken for long periods of time.

What can I do to help myself?

See your family physician and get treatment! You do not have to suffer the debilitating symptoms of depression and mania. This condition can be effectively treated. The sooner you seek help, the speedier your recovery. Educate yourself on the symptoms and treatment. Work with your family physician or mental health professional, take your medication as prescribed, and report any side effects. Develop a healthy lifestyle that includes moderate exercise and time for relaxation and recreation.

Some concrete suggestions to help yourself:

- It is very important to continue taking your medication, even when you begin to feel better. Do not stop without consulting your doctor first.
- A personal support network of friends or family is vital. Your closest friends and relatives need to be aware of your illness and be able to recognize the symptoms.
- Regular periods of rest and sleep are essential. Your body needs at least 7 - 8 hours of healthy sleep every night.
- Proper eating habits should be maintained. Fight the urge to binge eat or to eat unhealthy foods.
- Use of all stimulants should be reduced or halted, as they can trigger an episode.
- Use of all street drugs *must* be stopped altogether, as they can be extremely dangerous and can trigger or worsen an episode of illness.
- Use of alcohol should be very limited or stopped altogether.
- Major financial or emotional decisions should be put off until an episode is over.
- Learn as much as you can about this disorder. The more knowledge you have, the less you will be affected by the ignorance and social stigma that is often associated with mental illness.