Mood Disorders

Mood disorders are conditions that affect the way a person feels emotionally. The main mood disorders include:

- Depression.
- Bipolar disorder.
- Dysthymia. Symptoms of dysthymia are similar to depression, but not as severe. Dysthymia is a mild, lasting (*chronic*) depression.
- Cyclothymia. Symptoms of cyclothymia are similar to those of bipolar disorder, but less extreme. Cyclothymia includes mood swings, but the highs and lows are not as severe as they are in bipolar disorder.

CAUSES

Mood disorders are probably caused by a combination of factors. People with mood disorders seem to have physical and chemical changes in their brains. Mood disorders run in families, so there may be genetic causes. Severe trauma or stressful life events may also increase the risk of mood disorders.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of mood disorders depend on the specific type of condition.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad, worthless, hopeless.
- Negative thoughts.
- Inability to enjoy one's usual activities.
- Low energy.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Appetite changes.
- Crying.
- Problems with concentration.
- Thoughts of harming oneself.

Symptoms of bipolar disorder include:

- Periods of depression (see above symptoms).
- Mood swings, from sadness and depression, to abnormal elation and excitement.
- Periods of mania:
  - Racing thoughts.
  - Fast speech.
  - Poor judgment; careless, dangerous choices.
  - Decreased need for sleep.
  - Risky behavior.
  - Difficulty concentrating.
  - Irritability.
  - Increased energy.
  - Increased sex drive.

DIAGNOSIS

There are no blood tests or x-rays that can confirm a mood disorder. However, your caregiver may choose to run some tests to make sure that there is not another physical cause for your symptoms. A mood disorder is usually diagnosed after an in-depth interview with a healthcare provider.

TREATMENT

Mood disorders can be treated with one or more of the following:

- Medicine (antidepressants, mood-stabilizers, anti-psychotics).
- Psychotherapy (talk therapy).
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (you are taught to recognize negative thoughts and behavior patterns, and replace them with healthy thoughts and behaviors).
- Electroconvulsive therapy (for very severe cases of deep depression, a series of treatments in which an electrical current is applied to the brain).
- Vagus nerve stimulation (a pulse of electricity is applied to a portion of the brain).
- Transcranial magnetic stimulation (powerful magnets are placed on the head that produce electrical currents).
- Hospitalization. In severe situations, or when someone is having serious thoughts of harming him or herself, hospitalization may be necessary in order to keep the person safe. This is also done to quickly start and monitor treatment.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take your medicine exactly as directed.
- Attend all of your therapy sessions.
- Try to eat regular, healthy meals.
- Exercise daily – exercise is known to improve mood symptoms.
- Get good sleep.
- **Do not** use alcohol, pot, or other drugs. These can worsen mood symptoms and cause anxiety and psychosis.
- If you develop any side effects, such as nausea, dry mouth, dizziness, constipation, drowsiness, tremor, weight gain, or sexual symptoms, tell your caregiver. He or she may suggest things you can do to improve symptoms.
- Consider learning some ways to cope with the stress of having a chronic illness. This includes yoga, meditation, tai chi, or participating in a support group.
- Drink a lot of water and eat a high-fiber diet to avoid constipation from medicine.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Worsening mood.
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or others.
- Inability to care for yourself.
- The sensation of hearing or seeing something that is not actually present (*auditory* or *visual hallucinations*).
- Abnormal thoughts.

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