Manic Depressive Illness
(Bipolar Disorder)

Bipolar disorder is also known as manic depressive illness. It is when the brain does not function properly and causes shifts in a person's moods, energy and ability to function in everyday life. These shifts are different from the normal ups and downs that everyone experiences. Instead the shifts are severe. If this goes untreated, the person's life becomes more and more disorderly. People with this disorder can be treated can lead full and productive lives. This disorder must be managed throughout life.

SYMPTOMS

- Bipolar disorder causes dramatic mood swings. These mood swings go in cycles. They cycle from extreme “highs” and irritable to deep “lows” of sadness and hopelessness.
- Between the extreme moods, there are usually periods of normal mood.
- Along with the mood shifts, the person will have severe changes in energy and behavior. The periods of "highs" and "lows" are called episodes of **mania** and **depression**.

Signs of mania:

- Lots of energy, activity and restlessness.
- Extreme “high” or good mood.
- Extreme irritability.
- Racing thoughts and talking very fast.
- Jumping from one idea to another.
- Not able to focus, easily distracted.
- Little need to sleep.
- Grand beliefs in one's abilities and powers.
- Spending sprees.
- Increased sexual drive. This can result in many sexual partners.
- Poor judgment.
- Abuse of drugs, particularly cocaine, alcohol, and sleeping medication.
- Aggressive or provocative behavior.
- A lasting period of behavior that is different from usual.
- Denial that anything is wrong.

*A manic episode is identified if a “high” mood happens with three or more of the other symptoms lasting most of the day, nearly everyday for a week or longer. If the mood is more irritable in nature, four additional symptoms must be present.

Signs of depression:

- Lasting feelings of sadness, anxiety or empty mood.
- Feelings of hopelessness with negative thoughts.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sex.
- Feelings of fatigue or having less energy.
- Trouble focusing, making decisions, remembering.
- Feeling restless or irritable.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Change in eating with possible weight gain or loss.
- Feeling ongoing pain that is not caused by physical illness or injury.
- Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts.

*A depressive episode is identified as having five or more of the above symptoms that last most of the day, nearly everyday for two weeks or longer.

CAUSES

- Research shows that there is no single cause for the disorder. Many factors act together to produce the illness.
- This can be passed down from family (*hereditary*).
- Environment may play a part.

TREATMENT

- Long-term treatment is strongly recommended because bipolar disorder is a repeated illness. This disorder is better controlled if treatment is ongoing than if it is off and on.
- A combination of medication and talk therapy is best for managing the disorder over time.
- Medication.
  - Medication can be prescribed by a doctor that is an expert in treating mental disorders (*psychiatrists*). Medications known as “mood stabilizers” are usually prescribed to help control the illness. Other medications can be added when needed. These medicines usually treat episodes of mania or depression that break through despite the mood stabilizer.
- Talk Therapy.
  - Along with medication, some forms of talk therapy are helpful in providing support, education and guidance to people with the illness and their families. Studies show that this type of treatment increases mood stability, decreases need for hospitalization and improves how they function society.
- Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT).
  - In extreme situations where the above treatments do not work or work too slowly to relieve severe symptoms, ECT may be considered.

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