

# MEASURE™

Modeling Effective Antipsychotic Therapeutic Success by Utilizing Real Evidence

P A T I E N T E D U C A T I O N T O O L S

## Frequently Asked Questions About Bipolar Disorder

### WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder (also known as manic-depressive disorder) is a treatable mental health disease. It appears as a disturbance of a person's mood characterized by alternating periods of depression and mania. These mood shifts can be mild, moderate, or severe, and are accompanied by changes in thinking and behavior.

Bipolar disorder affects more than two million adult Americans. It usually begins in late adolescence (often appearing as depression in late teen years), although it can start in early childhood or later in life. An equal number of men and women develop this illness (men tend to begin with a manic episode, women with a depressive episode) and it occurs among all ages, races, ethnic groups, and social classes.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BIPOLAR DISORDER?

A mood change alone is not necessarily a symptom for the diagnosis of depression or mania. Most people who have bipolar disorder experience "highs" and "lows"—the highs are periods of mania, the lows are periods of depression.

#### Mania

The main symptom of mania is an elevated mood. Examples include

- Heightened self-esteem, activity, work ability, less need for sleep to the point of interfering with social and physical activities
- Feeling euphoric, elated, high, irritable, angry, hostile, rapid mood swings from happy to angry in minutes
- Thoughts of power, grandiosity, flights of ideas, misinterpretation of events, hallucinations, delusions
- Excessive energy, barely sleeping at night, heightened senses
- Overspending, socially intrusive, angry and demanding, talking more than usual and rapidly, increased sexual activity

#### Depression

Feelings of sadness, disappointment, and frustration are part of daily life. The diagnosis of depression is made only when such states are intense, pervasive, persistent, and interfere with the usual social and physical states.

Symptoms may include

- Feeling sad, low, blue, ashamed, remorseful, guilty, loss of interest at work, loss of feelings for family and friends
- Anxiety, fears, pessimism, loss of interest in sex
- Slowed thinking, difficulty concentrating, loss of self-esteem, loss of reality (hallucinations, delusions), thoughts of suicide
- Changes in appetite and weight, sleep problems, loss of energy, headaches, body aches, agitation or restlessness
- Slowed talking or moving, withdrawal from friends and family, crying easily, excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs



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## WHAT CAUSES BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Researchers have not identified a single cause of bipolar disorder. Genetic, biological, environmental, stress, and personality factors can all contribute to bipolar disorder. There may be biological factors that play a major role in producing the illness. The illness tends to run in families and appears to have a genetic link. Like depression and other serious illnesses, genetic markers may be able to identify people at risk.

## HOW IS BIPOLAR DISORDER TREATED?

Several therapies exist for bipolar disorder and promising new treatments are currently under investigation. Because bipolar can be difficult to treat, it is highly recommended that the person should consult a psychiatrist or general practitioner with experience in treating this illness. Treatment of bipolar disorder depends on the symptoms, the severity and duration of illness, possible other stresses, and previous responses to treatment. Treatment may include one or any combination of the following

- Medication
- Psychotherapy
- Electroconvulsive treatment
- Nutritional counseling
- Exercise

## HOW DO I HELP A RELATIVE OR FRIEND?

One of the most important things a friend or relative can do for a person with bipolar disorder is to learn about the illness. Often, people who are depressed or manic do not recognize the symptoms in themselves. Help the affected person to get a diagnosis and treatment. A plan should be made for severe manic or depressive symptoms.

## WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

### National Mental Health Association

<http://www.nmha.org>

### Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

<http://www.ndmda.org>

### National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

### National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

<http://www.nami.org>

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<http://www.afsp.org>

### Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation

<http://www.bpkids.org>



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