

Bipolar Disorder information

Bipolar disorder is a severe mood disorder that is also known as bipolar affective disorder or manic depression. It causes severe mood swings that can last several weeks or months. It is characterised by low mood (depression) which is a state of intense despair and high mood (manic) which is extreme happiness or elation. There can also be a mixed state e.g. depressed mood with restlessness and over activity.

You may hear about different types of bipolar disorder. These are Bipolar I; Bipolar II; rapid cycling and Cyclothymia. More detail on these can be found at www.rcpsych.ac.uk or www.rethink.org.

Symptoms

For low mood, the symptoms are generally similar to depression, but they last longer and are severe.

These include unhappiness, feeling hopeless, can't start or complete things, tearful, can't make simple decisions and lack of social contact.

For high mood the individual will feel an extreme sense of wellbeing that affects thinking and judgement.

These include high level of self importance, excited, moving quickly from one idea to the next, hearing voices, unable to sleep, making unrealistic plans and odd decisions, talking quickly and being less inhibited.

Some people also develop psychotic symptoms e.g. grandiose beliefs or such low self esteem that they don't exist and may have hallucinations.

Between episodes, the person may feel well or still have mild depressive symptoms.

Treatment

Bipolar disorder will usually be treated with medication but this can be combined with other interactions such as psychological treatment and use of community mental health teams, hostel or day care as available.

Self help

To help to keep yourself well you can have a well-balanced diet with regular eating pattern and minimal caffeine. Try to avoid stressful situations and allow time for relaxation. A regular sleep pattern will also help.

Support organisations

Bipolar UK – information, support groups (including Bristol) and offer a self management training course. Helpline and further services available as a member (currently £20)

www.bipolaruk.org.uk

Rethink – information and leaflets with helpline.

www.rethink.org Tel 0300 5000 927

Royal college of Psychiatrists – information and leaflets.

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Samaritans- support when in distress

www.samaritans.org Tel: 08457 90 90 90

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