

Bipolar disorder is a complex mental illness that may affect about 8 million adults in the United States.^{1,2} Bipolar disorder causes extreme swings in mood: lows called bipolar depression to highs called bipolar mania.³ Patients reported that depressive symptoms were more disruptive than manic symptoms in bipolar disorder, interfering with a person's ability to handle everyday tasks, such as work or family life.⁴

It's important to know that bipolar disorder is a real medical condition that can be diagnosed, treated, and managed, similar to many other chronic illnesses.⁵

Symptoms of bipolar depression

Symptoms of bipolar depression include feelings of sadness and emptiness, depressed moods, and inability to concentrate.³

Symptoms of bipolar mania

Symptoms of bipolar mania include unusually and persistently elevated mood, irritability, increased energy, and racing thoughts.³

CHALLENGES IN DIAGNOSING BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder can be difficult to diagnose because patients may overlook their manic symptoms when talking to their physician.^{4,6} This is because many patients with bipolar disorder experience more lows (bipolar depression) than highs (bipolar mania) or they may not recognize their manic symptoms as abnormal behavior.^{4,7,8}

As a result, some people who have been initially diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) may actually have bipolar depression.⁶ MDD is a separate disorder that shares some of the same symptoms of bipolar depression.³ In fact, it can take up to 10 years or more for bipolar disorder to be diagnosed accurately.⁶ An initial misdiagnosis, whether it's MDD or another mental illness, can follow a person for years, potentially leading to inappropriate treatment that may worsen their disease.^{1,6}

If you question your diagnosis or it appears to be unclear, talk to your physician. As part of a thorough screening, your physician may ask you about your psychiatric history, including your family history.⁵ These steps can help your physician make an accurate diagnosis and design a treatment plan that's appropriate for you and your condition.

MANAGING BIPOLAR DEPRESSION

Although there is no cure for bipolar disorder, with an accurate diagnosis and the appropriate treatment, bipolar disorder and its depressive symptoms can be managed successfully. It's important to know that managing bipolar disorder is an ongoing process that involves medication, talk therapy, support groups, and support from family and friends.⁵

If you're being treated for bipolar depression, talk with your physician about what to expect from your treatment. Since every patient is different, a treatment that may be appropriate for some patients may not be appropriate for others. If you still have depressive symptoms despite being on treatment, ask your physician if there are adjustments to your treatment plan or if there is another treatment option that might be appropriate for you. With the appropriate treatment, you can help manage the symptoms and work toward your goals.⁵

Visit www.JoinThinkingForward.com to enroll in *Thinking Forward*[™], a support program for people with bipolar disorder. *Thinking Forward* offers you treatment information as well as other free information, resources, and practical advice designed to help you work with your physician and move forward with your treatment plan. You can also visit www.TalkingAboutBipolar.com where you can learn more about bipolar depression and download useful tools like a mood diary and medication tracker.

References

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