

Bipolar Disorder



The Mississippi Department of Mental Health is working to change the way you think about mental health. One of the most difficult challenges the field of mental health faces in Mississippi is stigma. Our goal is to eliminate misconceptions and promote a better understanding of mental health and illnesses. The following information is a way to help you "Think Again" about bipolar disorder and understand the related issues.

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy and ability to function. Different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through, the symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. They can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide. But there is good news: bipolar disorder can be treated, and people with this illness can lead full and productive lives.

More than two million American adults, or about one percent of the population age 18 and older in any given year, have bipolar disorder. It is often not recognized as an illness, and people may suffer for years before it is properly diagnosed and treated. Like diabetes or heart disease, bipolar disorder is a long-term illness that must be carefully managed throughout a person's life.

What are the signs & symptoms?

Bipolar disorder causes dramatic mood swings from overly "high" and/or irritable to sad and hopeless, and then back again, often with periods of normal mood in between. Severe changes in energy and behavior go along with these changes in mood. The periods of highs and lows are called episodes of mania and depression.

What causes bipolar disorder?

The presence of bipolar disorder indicates a biochemical imbalance which alters a person's moods. This imbalance is thought to be caused by irregular hormone production or a problem with certain chemicals in the brain, called neurotransmitters, that act as messengers to our nerve cells. Although a specific genetic link to bipolar disorder has not been found, studies show that 80 to 90 percent of those who suffer from bipolar disorder have relatives with some form of depression.

What type of treatment is available?

Most people with bipolar disorder can achieve substantial stabilization of their mood swings and related symptoms over time with proper treatment. A strategy that combines medication and psycho-social treatment is optimal for managing the disorder over time. For more information, please contact the Mississippi Department of Mental Health at (601) 359-1288 or your local community mental health center.