

D. How is Bipolar Disorder Treated?

Medication and psychotherapy are the main treatments. Using a combination of treatments works best.

Medication – Most people with bipolar disorder take medications called “mood stabilizers” to reduce extreme swings in mood. The doctor may also prescribe an antidepressant medication. It takes several weeks for medications to reach their full effect.

Psychotherapy – This approach helps the person to identify patterns that lead up to a bipolar episode. The therapist will suggest strategies for managing stress and coping with uncertainties.

Hospitalization – Treatment in hospital is sometimes needed, but is usually brief (1-2 weeks). Occasionally, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), also known as “shock treatment,” is used if the person is suicidal or if medication is not working.

Self-Care – Patients and their families should learn all they can about bipolar disorder. Involve family and friends in watching for warning signs and call the doctor if an episode is starting.

- Medication should not be stopped even if the person is feeling better.
- Do not use drugs or alcohol, as these substances may trigger a bipolar episode.

You can also help by seeking advice. If you think you or someone you know is suffering from bipolar disorder, contact:

- Mission Mental Health Centre
604.814.5600
- Abbotsford Mental Health Centre
604.870.7800
- Chilliwack Mental Health Centre
604.702.4860
- Hope Mental Health Centre
604.860.7733

Mental Health centres are open Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m to 4:30 p.m.

- Emergency Mental Health Services
604.820.1166 or 1.877.820.7444
- Aboriginal Mental Health Liaison Program, Sto:lo Nation Health Services
1.877.411.3200
(Serves Tsawwassen to Boston Bar)
- BC Mental Health Information Line
1.800.661.2121 | www.heretohelp.bc.ca
- Mood Disorders Association of BC
604.873.0103 | www.mdabc.net
- BC Schizophrenia Society
1.888.888.0029 | www.bcscs.org

There is no cost to you for the above mentioned services

The content of this brochure was developed by the:

First Nations Mental Health Program

Strathcona Mental Health Team
330 Heatley Street
Vancouver, BC V6A 3G3
Tel: 604.253.4401

BIPOLAR DISORDER



A Guide for the Aboriginal Community

This guide will answer some of the commonly asked questions about bipolar disorder.

A. What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is an illness in which people have mood swings that are out of proportion with what is going on in their lives. The person experiences emotional highs (mania) and lows (depression), often with periods of normal moods in between. Bipolar disorder usually begins in the late teens or early twenties. There is no known cure for bipolar disorder, but it can be managed with medication and support.

As an aboriginal person, do I have a greater chance of getting bipolar disorder?

No. Bipolar disorder is found all over the world – in all races, all cultures and in all social classes. It affects 1 in every 20 people worldwide.

What causes bipolar disorder?

The causes of bipolar disorder are not yet completely understood. It does tend to run in families, but is NOT caused by bad parenting or by poverty.

Research has shown that people with bipolar disorder have an unstable pattern of nerve impulses in the brain. This problem makes them more sensitive to emotional and physical stress (e.g. an upsetting life experience, use of street drugs, lack of sleep). The normal mechanisms for restoring calm functioning in the brain don't always work properly.

B. What are the Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder can range from a mild condition to a severe condition. How long a person remains manic or depressed varies, but usually ranges from a few days to several months. The symptoms of bipolar disorder are not the same for everyone, but often include the following:

Mania

- elevated mood, inflated self-esteem
- rapid speech, racing thoughts
- excessive energy, heightened senses
- poor judgment, reckless behaviour
- lack of concentration, difficulty sleeping

Depression

- feelings of sadness, guilt, hopelessness
- loss of energy and interest in activities
- disturbed sleeping and eating patterns
- difficulty concentrating
- recurring thoughts of suicide

C. How is Bipolar Disorder Diagnosed?

People with bipolar disorder often don't recognize that they are ill. Left untreated, the condition usually worsens. Friends and family are important in recognizing the possible signs of bipolar disorder and urging the person to seek help. After recovery, most bipolar patients are grateful for the help they received, even if it was given against their will at the time.

It is important that the person with bipolar disorder be free of drugs and alcohol in order to get an accurate diagnosis from a psychiatrist. The doctor will ask questions about the person's signs and symptoms, and will rule out any other possible causes. There are some other mental health conditions (e.g. depression, schizophrenia) and physical causes (e.g. alcohol / drug abuse, thyroid disorders) that may produce symptoms that are similar to bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder is not black and white. Other problems, such as anxiety disorders or alcoholism may affect people with bipolar disorder. It is also possible for mania and depression to be present at the same time.

