



*San Diego's Voice On Mental Illness*

**Mania**

Describes the activated phase of bipolar disorder

- Happy mood or irritable, angry, unpleasant mood
- Increased activity or energy
- More thoughts and faster thinking than normal
- Increased talking, more rapid speech than normal
- Ambitious, often grandiose plans, increased sexual interest and activity
- Decreased sleep and decreased need for sleep

**Depression**

The other phase of bipolar disorder:

- Depressed or apathetic mood
- Decreased activity and energy
- Restlessness and irritability
- Fewer thoughts than usual and slowed thinking
- Less talking and slowed speech
- Less interest or participation in, and less enjoyment of activities normally enjoyed
- Decreased sexual interest and activity
- Hopeless and helpless feelings
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Pessimistic outlook, thoughts of suicide
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleep patterns

**BIPOLAR DISORDER**

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a serious brain disorder that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy and functioning. It affects 2.3 million Americans, or 1.2% of the population. Bipolar disorder is characterized by episodes of mania and depression that can last from days to months. It is a chronic condition with recurring episodes that often begin in adolescence or early adulthood. It generally requires ongoing treatment.

*What are the causes of bipolar disorder?*

While the exact cause of bipolar disorder is not known, researchers believe it is the result of a chemical imbalance in certain parts of the brain.

Scientists have found evidence of a genetic predisposition to the illness. Bipolar disorder tends to run in families and close relatives of someone with bipolar disorder are more likely to be affected by this disorder. Sometimes serious life events such as a serious loss, chronic illness, or financial problems, can trigger an episode in some individuals with a predisposition to the disorder. There are other possible "triggers" of bipolar episodes: the treatment of depression with an antidepressant medication may trigger a switch into mania. Sleep deprivation may trigger mania, or hypothyroidism may produce depression or mood instability.

*How is bipolar disorder treated?*

While there is no cure for bipolar disorder it is a highly treatable and manageable illness.

After an accurate diagnosis, most people (80 to 90 percent) can be successfully treated. Medication is an essential part of successful treatment. Maintenance treatment reduces the number and severity of episodes for most people, although episodes of mania or depression may occur and require additional treatment. In addition, psychosocial therapies are important to help people to understand the illness and cope with the stresses that can trigger episodes.

**Mixed state and "rapid cycling"**

A **mixed state** is when symptoms of mania and depression occur at the same time. During a mixed state depressed mood accompanies manic activation. The symptoms during a mixed state often include agitation, trouble sleeping, significant change in appetite, psychosis and suicidal thinking.

Sometimes individuals may experience regularly alternating periods of mania and depression. When four or more episodes of illness occur within a 12-month period, the individual is said to have bipolar disorder with rapid cycling. Rapid cycling is more common in women.

## Medications used to treat mania

Two medications commonly used to treat manic episodes of bipolar disorder are called *mood stabilizers*, and they include *lithium (Eskalith or Lithobid)* and *divalproex sodium (Depakote)*.

- Lithium has long been used as a first line treatment for acute mania in people with bipolar disorder. Lithium is effective for preventing episodes of mania from occurring and for treating an episode after it has begun. However, for some individuals, lithium is ineffective, and for others, lithium has a variety of side effects that may make it an undesirable treatment option.
- *Depakote* is an anticonvulsant that seems to be as effective as lithium for treating mania and it has fewer side effects, although it may not be appropriate for people with a history of liver problems.
- Other anticonvulsant medications have also been found to be effective treatments for mania, including carbamazepine (*Tegretol*), lamotrigine (*Lamictal*), gabapentin (*Neorontin*), and topiramate (*Topamax*).
- Mania may also be treated acutely with antipsychotic medications in addition to a mood stabilizer.

*Open Your Mind*



*Mental Illnesses  
Are Brain Disorders*

**1-800-950-NAMI**

## Medications used to treat depression

During depressive episodes, people with bipolar disorder may need additional treatment with an antidepressant medication. Because of the risk of triggering mania, doctors often prescribe lithium or an anticonvulsant mood stabilizer with an antidepressant. Antidepressant medications relieve depression, elevate mood, and activate behavior, but it often takes 3 to 4 weeks to respond. Sometimes a variety of different antidepressants and doses will be tried before finding the medication that works best for a particular individual.

There are several different types of antidepressants used to treat depression including tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), or newer antidepressants that function in different ways.

The risk of suicide may temporarily increase during the early stages of treatment while energy levels and the ability to take action return before mood improves.

## NAMI San Diego

NAMI San Diego, a non-profit organization, provides education, support services, and advocacy to improve the quality of life of everyone affected by mental illnesses. It is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI California. Its membership includes persons with brain disorders, their families, friends, mental health professionals and supportive members of the community.

NAMI offers monthly informational meetings, a monthly newsletter, free educational programs, a lending library of books and video-tapes, and support meetings for consumers and families throughout the county

For Information and support, call

**NAMI San Diego  
Helpline**

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