



## Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a condition which involves both major depressive and manic episodes.

Characteristics of major depressive episode include the following:

1. *Depressed mood:* All persons report a degree of unhappiness and may cry often although severely depressed individuals may feel the need to cry but will not be able to. Persons with depressed mood feel both hopeless and helpless
2. *Loss of pleasure or interest in usual activities.* This is known as anhedonia and the person is unable to enjoy activities that they typically got enjoyment from.
3. *Disturbance of appetite.* The majority of depressed individuals lose their appetite and lose weight yet a minority tend to eat more and gain weight.
4. *Sleep disturbance.* These include insomnia where a person is unable to sleep for long periods of time, waking up early and not being able to sleep again, not being able to get to sleep at all and awakening several times at night. Depressed people may also sleep excessively.
5. *Psychomotor retardation or agitation.* In psychomotor retardation the person moves slowly, seems overwhelmed and tired and has difficulty in speaking. Infrequently persons may experience psychomotor agitation characterised by continuous movement such as moving about a lot.
6. *Loss of energy.* There is sharp decrease in energy levels of the sufferer who may feel exhausted without having done anything.
7. *Feelings of worthlessness and guilt.* Depressed individuals often feel that they are incapable and useless and these feelings are often experienced together with guilt. If there is a problem, the person often attributes blame within themselves.
8. *Difficulties in thinking.* Mental processes are slowed down and individuals are often indecisive and find it difficult to think, concentrate and remember things.
9. *Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.* People experiencing major depressive episode often feel that they and other people would be better off dead.

Manic episode has the following symptoms:

1. *Elevated or irritable mood.* The person often feels enthusiastic about everything; view the world as being a wonderful place and feel good all the time. They view other people as being slow and negative and may become hostile if somebody tries to interfere with their plans or bring them back to reality.
2. *Inflated self-esteem.* People with mania see themselves as being extremely attractive, important, powerful and capable of doing anything.
3. *Sleeplessness.* Individuals experience a decrease in sleep but not in energy.
4. *Talkativeness.* Persons going through a manic episode talk loudly, rapidly and all the time. They often interrupt speech with irrelevant details and may say jokes that they alone find amusing.
5. *Distractability:* Individuals are easily distracted.
6. *Flight of ideas:* People with mania often have a lot of incoherent ideas that are reflected in their speech.
7. *Hyperactivity:* Increased restlessness and physical activity.
8. *Reckless behaviour.* Impulsive actions are often taken such as shopping uncontrollably and debts are incurred.

The individual typically experiences normal functioning interspersed with depressive and manic episodes. It affects 1%-2% of the adult population.

**Famous people with bipolar disorder:**

- Ben Stiller (actor)
- Virginia Woolf (novelist)
- Ludwig van Beethoven (composer)
- Theodore Roosevelt (President of the USA)

**Treatment:** A combination of psychosocial interventions and medication are used to help individuals become in control of their conditions.

**Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT):** It modifies problematic thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

**Psychodynamic therapy:** seeks to discover and deal with early traumas that are believed to have caused depression.

**Medication:** Various types of antidepressants are often prescribed to deal with depressive episode and lithium to alleviate mania. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) where seizures are electrically induced in people with depression is also used and can have remarkable outcome. It is used as a last resort.

**Professional help:** It is important to seek help from qualified psychiatrists who can prescribe medication and qualified therapists who are specifically trained to use techniques that help the sufferer deal with his/her symptoms and feelings.

