



Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is a chemical imbalance brain disorder. A chemical imbalance in the brain occurs when there is either too little or too much of certain neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are the chemical messengers, such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Serotonin is considered the “happy drug”, while Dopamine is considered the “feel good drug” because of the way they control and regulate mood and emotions. Norepinephrine is a bit different as it helps regulate attentiveness, sleeping, dreaming, and learning. Furthermore, norepinephrine is also released as an actual hormone into the blood, where it causes blood vessels to contract and heart rate to increase.

2.9% of kids (about 3 out of 100 or approximately 1.7 million) have a Bipolar diagnosis. Bipolar Disorder causes intense mood swings, ranging from emotional highs to emotional lows. The mood swings tend to be episodic and sporadic and vary in how often and for how long they occur for each individual person. The mood swings often affect sleep, activity, behavior and the ability to do everyday tasks, such as school work and chores.

The emotional highs are referred to as mania or hypomania. During a manic episode, kids often feel very energized, “hyped” and restless. Their activity level is high and they think they can do a lot of things at once and believe they can do them very well. They can also appear agitated and have trouble sleeping during a manic episode. Symptoms of mania include:

- Racing Thoughts
- Intense Irritability/quick-tempered
- High self-esteem
- Feelings of invincibility
- Not sleeping much
- Talking Quickly
- Substance Use
- Unsafe Sex
- Gambling

- Trouble concentrating/easily distracted
- Suddenly driven to accomplish your goals or try new activities
- Skipping school

Mania may also trigger psychosis. Symptoms may include delusions, acting unusually silly, hallucinations, talking incoherently and/or fast, and agitation. At times, those experiencing psychosis and having hallucinations may need to be hospitalized.

The emotional lows are referred to as major depressive episodes. During a depressive episode, it can be difficult for a kid to concentrate and participate in normal, daily routines. A kid in the midst of a major depressive episode may feel depressed, sad, empty and/or hopeless. They generally have low energy and appear to lose interest in activities they usually enjoy. Symptoms of depressive episodes include:

- Feelings of Sadness or Anxiousness
- Feelings of Guilt or Hopelessness
- Low Self-Esteem
- Lethargic/Extreme Exhaustion
- Somatic Complaints (Headache & Stomachache)
- Loss of interest in activities they usually enjoy
- Change in Sleep and/or Appetite
- Thoughts of Death/Suicide Attempts

Diagnosis:

Bipolar Disorder in kids can be very challenging to diagnose, especially in adolescents. It can be difficult to distinguish between typical adolescent behavior, as it is quite normal for adolescents to have extreme mood swings. And as of right now, there are no blood tests or definitive brain scans that diagnosis Bipolar Disorder.

Instead, doctors and/or mental health practitioners rely on behavior tracking and self-reporting to determine patterns as well as family history. Kids of parents with Bipolar Disorder have a much greater risk of having Bipolar Disorder than those who do not have parents with Bipolar Disorder.

There is also some research that indicates that hardships and trauma may exponentially increase the possibility of developing bipolar disorder in youth as well as adults when there is already a hereditary factor of having the disorder.

Some research studies have found differences in brain structure and function between people who have bipolar disorder and those who do not. Researchers are studying the disorder to learn more about its causes and effective treatments.

Treatment:

Bipolar Disorder is often treated with medication. Medications affect individuals differently, so medications need to be monitored closely. Due to the complexity of the disorder, it often takes multiple medications to manage the symptoms. It may also take quite a bit of trial and error through medication adjustments before the right combination of medications is found. Generally, doctors often begin with low doses. Psychotherapy is also very beneficial to individuals with Bipolar Disorder and is used to help them and their family understand and manage their symptoms.

What Parents Can Do:

- Pay attention to signs and symptoms. If you believe your kid may have Bipolar Disorder, contact your doctor and/or a mental health professional.
- Listen to your kid and encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Be patient and understanding of their symptoms.
- Watch for any signs of suicidal ideation. Consult a mental health professional and/or your family doctor immediately if you notice signs of suicidal ideation.
- Notify the doctor if you notice harmful side effects from the medications.
- Help your kid understand their treatment plan so they can learn to manage their symptoms. One way you can do this is to create a chart to track behaviors and moods.

Resources:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/bipolar-disorder-in-children-and-teens/index.shtml>

www.nami.org › [Mental-Health-Conditions](#) › [Bipolar-D...](#)

[Bipolar Statistics, Myths, and Facts - WebMD](#)

[DMDD Versus Bipolar Disorder | MGH Clay Center for Young ...](#)

[NIMH » Bipolar Disorder](#)

www.nimh.nih.gov › [health](#) › [statistics](#) › [bipolar-disorder](#)

