



## **Bipolar Disorder Fact Sheet**

### **What is Bipolar Disorder?**

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a serious brain disorder that causes extreme shifts in mood, energy, and functioning. It is characterized by episodes of mania and depression that can last from days to months and usually begins in late adolescence, but can begin in early childhood or as late as a person's 40s or 50s. There is a strong genetic component related to bipolar disorder; however, genetics do not always predict who will develop the condition. Bipolar disorder is chronic and recurrent; most people require some form of treatment for the rest of their lives. A strategy that combines medication and psychosocial treatment is optimal for managing the disorder over time.

Approximately 2.3 million Americans are diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but the number affected by this disorder is even greater. When properly treated, people with this illness can lead full and productive lives. If left untreated, however, the disorder can produce catastrophic results. Approximately 25-50 percent of people with bipolar disorder attempt suicide at least once; this is one of the highest rates for any psychiatric disorder. The World Health Organization estimates that bipolar disorder is the sixth leading cause of disability in the world, with more than 5.7 million people affected worldwide.

### **Other Bipolar Disorder Statistics**

- Up to 90 percent of people with bipolar disorder have been reported to experience onset before age 20, but many struggle an average of 10 years before they receive an accurate diagnosis. Seven out of 10 people with bipolar disorder receive at least one misdiagnosis.
- Two-thirds of people with bipolar disorder are not properly diagnosed or treated.
- The mortality rate for people with untreated bipolar disorder is higher than it is for most types of heart disease and many types of cancer.
- People suffering from depression and bipolar disorder are far more likely to commit suicide than individuals in any other psychiatric or medical risk group.
- More than two-thirds of individuals who commit suicide suffered from a depressive illness or bipolar disorder.
- Approximately 40 percent of people with untreated bipolar disorder abuse alcohol or drugs.
- An equal number of men and women develop bipolar disorder, and it occurs among all ages, races, ethnic groups, and social classes.

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## **Costs Associated with Bipolar Disorder**

- Bipolar disorder accounts for approximately \$7.6 billion in direct healthcare costs in the U.S.
- Lifetime costs per consumer range from \$12,000 for a person with a single manic episode to hundreds of thousands of dollars for those with multiple episodes.

## **Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder**

Mood swings that come with bipolar disorder can be mild or severe, ranging from “lows” known as the depressive stage, to “highs” known as the manic phase. This change in mood can last for hours, days, weeks, or even months.

### Symptoms of mania

- Increased physical and mental activity and energy
- Heightened mood, exaggerated optimism and self-confidence
- Excessive irritability and aggressive behavior
- Decreased need for sleep without experiencing fatigue
- Grandiose delusions, inflated sense of self-importance
- Racing speech and thought, irrational ideas
- Impulsiveness, poor judgment and distractibility
- Reckless behavior, such as spending sprees, sexual indiscretions and/or alcohol abuse
- Delusions and hallucinations

### Symptoms of depression

- Loss of energy
- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Increased feelings of worry and anxiety
- Feelings of guilt or hopelessness
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Social withdrawal
- Unexplained aches or pains
- Use of chemical substances or alcohol

Educational materials on bipolar disorder and various treatment options are available in both English and Spanish. For more information, please visit the NAMI web site at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

*NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with serious mental illness and their families. Founded in 1979, NAMI has become the nation's voice on mental illness, a nationwide organization with affiliates in every state and in more than 1,100 local communities across the country.*

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