

# Bipolar Disorder

Nearly six million American adults suffer from bipolar disorder each year. Also known as manic depression, bipolar disorder is a serious illness that affects the brain. It can cause severe changes in mood and energy. These changes are much more intense than the normal “ups and downs” everyone experiences.

During “ups,” or manic periods, people with bipolar disorders feel unusually happy or outgoing, though they can also feel very irritable. Other changes include the following:

- Racing thoughts
- Talking very fast
- Increasing activities
- Sleeping little but not feeling tired
- Behaving impulsively
- Engaging in high-risk behaviors

During the “downs,” or depressive periods, a person with bipolar disorder feels sad and hopeless and may lose interest in activities they once enjoyed. Other changes include:

- Being tired all the time
- Having mental fog—difficulty concentrating, remembering, and making decisions
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Thinking excessively about death
- Considering or attempting suicide

Most of the time, bipolar symptoms appear before 25. In some people the condition is identified in childhood or in later life. If you have bipolar disorder, you may have trouble sustaining relationships, holding a job, or performing normal daily tasks consistently.

## Contributing Factors

Genetics play a big role in bipolar disorder. You have a five to 10 times greater risk of developing bipolar disorder if one of your immediate family members has the condition. Thyroid dysfunction is also linked to mental and behavioral issues including bipolar disorder.

## Treatment Options

An integrative approach to bipolar includes psychiatric treatment as well as a special diet and some targeted supplements. The ideal diet for a person with bipolar disorder is high in fats and proteins and low in carbohydrates. It’s also important to identify and cut out any foods that trigger bipolar symptoms. Zinc, magnesium, and vitamin C, and B-vitamins can also be useful. Fish oils are not recommended for people with bipolar disorder unless you have had tests to confirm that your gamma linolenic acid levels (GLA) are normal. Your integrative practitioner can help with this.

If you have symptoms of bipolar disorder, it’s important to bring them up with your healthcare provider. Though no test yet exists to diagnose bipolar disorder, there are tests to rule out other conditions that can be confused for it, like stroke or thyroid problems.

While bipolar disorder is considered incurable, a comprehensive treatment approach can help you to manage it effectively. Integrative medicine can help you to live a happy, healthy, and productive life.