

# BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER (Q&A)

SOURCE: CANADIAN NETWORK FOR MOOD AND ANXIETY DISORDERS (CANMAT)

## **Q: Can I pass this disorder on to my children?**

A: There is evidence from several studies that close relatives of someone with bipolar affective disorder are more likely than normal to develop the same disorder. However, even when a family member is affected, it is not possible to accurately predict the risk that person has for passing it on to his or her children.

## **Q: How can I tell if the medication is working properly?**

A: Mood stabilizers are working properly if they effectively control mood swings while producing few side effects. Some mood stabilizers also prevent further episodes of mania and depression from recurring, and if recurrent episodes do occur, they are often less severe and less frequent. It's important not to get discouraged if mood swings continue after starting medication. Although not everyone responds to a single medication, most eventually do, especially given in combination, and it's essential that treatment is not stopped before the medication has had an adequate chance to work.

## **Q: Will mood stabilizers reduce the likelihood of a person experiencing normal emotions?**

A: Mood stabilizers act more as mood 'levelers' and do not blanket feelings or emotions.

Once mood has stabilized closer to normal, people will continue to have normal

emotional reactions and experience little, if any, interference with mental or physical activity. Indeed, most people can carry out all their usual activities including going to work and driving a car.

## **Q: When will the medication start to work?**

A: Depending on the medication used, it may take several weeks before people notice an improvement in symptoms, and further improvement may be gradual. Therefore, at the outset of treatment, a mood stabilizer may be combined with a different medication so as to hasten symptomatic improvement. Knowing there is usually a delay in mood improvement when a medication is started should help prevent people from giving up too soon.

## **Q: Why are blood tests necessary when taking valproate or lithium?**

A: Tests are important because they help doctors better monitor the amount of medication present in the blood. Too little medication may not be effective in helping stabilize mood swings, whereas too much can lead to unwanted and sometimes serious side effects. So, blood tests are done to ensure that the dosage given is effective and safe.

## **Q: Can I drink alcohol while taking a mood stabilizer?**

A: Most people may have an occasional drink if they wish. However, the ability to drive and operate machinery may be impaired by the combination of the alcohol and mood stabilizers and should be avoided.





*"Treat it ... defeat it."*



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