

BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER IN TEENS

SOURCE: MEN'S HEALTH WEBSITE

Teenagers with bipolar affective disorder (manic depression) have an ongoing combination of extremely high (manic) and low (depressed) moods. Highs may alternate with lows, or the person may feel both extremes close to the same time.

Bipolar disorder usually starts in adult life before the age of 35. Although rare in young children, it does occur in teenagers. This illness can affect anyone. However, if one or both parents have the illness, the chances are greater that their children will develop the disorder.

Bipolar disorder may begin with either manic or depressive symptoms.

Manic symptoms may include:

- Severe changes in mood compared to others of the same age and background - either unusually happy or silly, or very irritable
- Unrealistic highs in self-esteem -- for example, a teenager who feels specially connected to God
- Great energy increase and the ability to go with little sleep or no sleep for days without feeling tired
- Increased talking - the adolescent talks too much, too fast, changes topics too quickly, and cannot be interrupted
- Distractibility - the teen's attention moves constantly from one thing to the next
- High risk-taking behavior, such as jumping off a roof with the belief that this will not cause injury

Depressive symptoms may include:

- Persistent sadness, frequent crying
- Loss of enjoyment in favorite activities
- Low energy level, poor concentration, complaints of boredom
- Major change in eating or sleeping patterns, such as oversleeping or overeating
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches or stomach aches

Some of these signs are like those that occur in teenagers with other problems such as drug abuse, delinquency, attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder, or even schizophrenia. The diagnosis can only be made with careful observation over an extended period. A thorough evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist can be helpful in identifying the problems, bipolar disorder or other, and starting specific treatment.

Teenagers with bipolar disorder can be effectively treated. Effective treatment for this illness usually includes education of the patient and the family about the illness, medication such as lithium, and psychotherapy. Lithium often reduces the number and severity of manic episodes and helps to prevent depression. Psychotherapy helps the teenager understand himself or herself, adapt to stresses, rebuild self-esteem, and improve relationships.





"There is hope and there is help. "



MDAM
MOOD DISORDERS
ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA

*Helping People
Help Themselves*

Page 2

