



Bipolar Affective Disorder

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What is Bipolar Affective Disorder (BPAD)?

Bipolar Affective Disorder, previously known as 'manic depression' is an illness in which someone experiences 'highs' and 'lows' in mood which can last for a number of weeks. You may hear health professionals refer to these as episodes as 'mania' and 'depression'.

Sometimes the affected individual can also experience psychosis during an episode. This means that they hear or see things that do not exist, known as hallucinations. In other cases the person may express delusional beliefs, such as being related to a celebrity or public figure, the belief that they have a power or skill, such as being able to read other's thoughts, or that others can influence their thoughts.

*For more information on Psychosis please check out our Psychosis factsheet.



Symptoms of BPAD

Whichever phase the person is going through will depend on the symptoms.

During a manic phase, symptoms may include:

- Feeling overly happy or elated
- Having lots of energy
- Talking fast
- Agitated and distracted
- Impulsive/uncharacteristic behaviour: spending large amounts of money, having multiple sexual partners, etc
- Difficulty sleeping or relaxing

During a phase of depression symptoms may include:

- Feeling low and hopeless
- Having little energy
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Lack of appetite
- Isolating oneself

Causes of BPAD

Like a lot of mental health conditions there is no clear-cut cause; the three most common factors that can contribute to developing Bipolar Affective Disorder are:

1. Genetics:

If a blood relative has had BPAD then you are considered to be at a higher risk of developing the condition.

2. Chemical imbalance:

Those with BPAD tend to have slightly different brain chemistry than those who do not have the condition – research is still underway to better understand this.

3. Significant life events/trauma:

Significant stress over a long period of time or a distressing or traumatic event can cause symptoms of BPAD to develop. This may include: abuse in childhood or adulthood, losing someone close to you, or relationship breakdown.

Treatment and support

If you are worried about whether you have this condition, then the first step is to speak to your GP. Likewise, if you are worried about someone else, encourage them to speak to their GP. Mental illness, like any physical illness such as cancer, stroke or Parkinson's Disease should be taken seriously and can only be diagnosed by a medical professional.

Once diagnosed you may be offered the following based on your needs:

- Medication: antidepressants, mood stabilisers and/or anti-psychotics, depending on your mood
- Talking therapy: counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), etc
- Hospital admission: where the condition is severe and/or where you are unable to keep yourself safe
- Referral to a Community Mental Health Team
- Referral to Community and Voluntary services or support groups

Self-Help Tips

In addition to what is outlined above, there are things you can do to manage these mood changes and to take care of yourself, such as:

- Monitoring your mood, noticing any significant changes
- Developing a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)
- Making time for yourself
- Taking up a hobby
- Developing a routine
- Trying mindfulness, relaxation or yoga
- Eating a balanced diet
- Exercising regularly
- Attending local support groups

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