

The Mind's Eye

Bipolar Disorder

Q What is bipolar disorder? What are some common signs and how is it treated?

A Caused by chemical imbalance in the brain, bipolar disorder—also called manic-depressive illness—is a condition causing extreme mood swings. People of all ages, male and female, suffer from bipolar disorder. And, it can be hereditary. Additionally, bipolar disorder could cause brain damage, however effective medication can help.

Someone with bipolar disorder can go quickly from feeling very happy, full of energy, and near invincible (mania) to feeling sad, inactive, and depressed.

Signs of mania may include:

- Feeling angry or irritable
- Talking so quickly that others can't follow
- Sleep deprivation
- Feeling powerful and important
- Inability to concentrate
- Spending money in excess
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Having unprotected sex

Signs of depression may include:

- Taking no pleasure in things once enjoyed
- Crying easily or for no reason
- Feeling lethargic, restless or irritable
- Changes in appetite and unintended weight fluctuation
- Problems remembering, concentrating or making decisions
- Headaches, backaches or digestive problems
- Abnormal sleep patterns, including wanting to sleep constantly
- Feeling tired all the time
- Thoughts of death and suicide

Bipolar disorder can be treated by your family doctor, who might refer you to a psychiatrist. Mood-stabilizing drugs are prescribed to balance highs and lows, while antidepressants can be taken to reduce the symptoms of depression. Counseling is also vital to improving emotional health.

If you are suffering from bipolar disorder, the following may help:

- Research bipolar disorder and tell your family what you learn
- Stick to a routine—sleep, eat and exercise approximately at the same time every day
- Take your medicine as prescribed—don't stop taking it when you start feeling better
- Avoid caffeine and over-the-counter medicines for colds, allergies and pain
- Ask your doctor before consuming alcohol or taking additional medications
- Avoid stressful situations
- Learn the early warning signs of your illness, and inform your doctor when you notice changes in your mood
- Join a local support group and share information and experiences with members



Dr. Aurora Andrews is a Psychiatrist in the Inpatient Psychiatric Unit. To learn more about Allegan General Hospital's mental health services, or to submit a question to The Mind's Eye, visit ag Hosp.org.