



**SIZWE**

MEDICAL FUND

Your health in caring hands

**BIPOLAR**  
DISORDER

What you need  
to know

**BECAUSE....CARING**  
COMES NATURALLY TO US

## What is Bipolar Disorder ?

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes unusual swings in mood, energy and activity levels, and affects the ability to perform day-to-day tasks. Because of its profound effect on mood, this condition is classified as a mood disorder. The high moods are classed as a form of mania, and the low moods are described as depression. Levels of severity differ from person to person, but sufferers should take heart as treatment is available and people with this condition can lead productive lives.

## What causes Bipolar Disorder ?



### **Family History/Genetics:**

The disorder does tend to run in families, so people with a parent or sibling diagnosed with bipolar disorder have a greater chance of developing it themselves.



### **Chemical Imbalance:**

Research has shown that this condition is linked to a chemical imbalance in the brain, which can be corrected with medication.



### **Events:**

Death of a loved one, relationship breakups, life-threatening events, financial problems, unemployment, serious accidents, stress, certain medications and bullying may trigger an episode.

## How is Bipolar Disorder diagnosed ?

Experts would commonly ask you a series of questions as a screening tool, to establish if you are bipolar. Once you've shared your answers, the medical professional will discuss an appropriate form of treatment with you.

(An example of the type of questionnaire may be found at this link: <http://www.sadag.org/images/pdf/mdq.pdf> )

## What are the other names for Bipolar Disorder ?

Bipolar disorder is sometimes called manic depression or bipolar mood disorder. (It is bipolar because moods alternate between extreme 'highs' and extreme 'lows'. Please refer to our leaflet on depression to understand the difference between a unipolar mood condition and a bipolar one.

## What are the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder ?

The symptoms are classified according to the types of episodes that can occur. This is really where the 'polar' part comes in – as you can see, these two states of mind are poles apart:



### Who to call for help:

**SADAG:** 0800 567 567 OR

SMS 31393 (South African Anxiety and Depression Group)

**LIFELINE:** 0861 322 322



## MANIA

(Manic Episode - The High):

- + Thoughts are racing; speech is rapid
- + Easily distracted
- + Get irritated easily
- + Energy level exceptionally high
- + Self-esteem is inflated
- + The person feels invincible; he believes he can conquer the world
- + More socialising takes place
- + Sleep is seen as a waste of time because the person has so much energy
- + Reckless behaviour increases: spending too much money, inappropriate sexual activity, making foolish business investments, alcohol or drug abuse
- + There is no consideration of consequences of the person's actions
- + In severe cases, hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that aren't there) and delusions (believing things that aren't real) are present.



## DEPRESSION

(Major Depressive Episode - The Low):

- + Feeling sad or blue
- + Loss of interests in the things you normally enjoy
- + Trouble sleeping, or sleeping too much
- + A loss of appetite or overeating
- + Concentration trouble
- + Feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem
- + Thoughts of suicide or dying
- + Hallucinations or delusions could also be present.

## Are there different types of Bipolar Disorder ?

**Yes** there are:



### **Bipolar I Disorder:**

You've had at least one manic episode, along with a hypomanic episode (less severe than a manic episode) or a major depressive episode.



### **Bipolar II Disorder:**

You've had at least one major depressive episode lasting at least two weeks, and at least one hypomanic episode lasting at least four days, but you've never actually experienced mania.



### **Cyclothymic Disorder:**

You've had at least two years of cycling through moderately bad 'highs' and 'lows' which hamper your quality of life.

## Why should Bipolar Disorder be treated ?

Bipolar disorder affects every aspect of the sufferer's life: their relationships, work, finances, parenting skills, marriages and more. It affects your children and your partner's lives too if left untreated. Ultimately bipolar disorder could lead to suicide attempts and death. You need to have it diagnosed and treated.

## How is Bipolar Disorder treated ?

Your doctor may prescribe mood stabilisers at certain times, and antidepressants at other times, depending on the symptoms you're experiencing, and the severity of those symptoms. Finding a doctor with whom you can build a good relationship, is vital.

# Are there any lifestyle changes I could make, to help or prevent Bipolar Disorder ?

Nothing can prevent bipolar disorder. Identifying how you feel, and having people around you who are able to gauge if there is a major difference in your mood can go a long way to getting the appropriate help in terms of a switch in medication. Eating healthily and getting adequate sleep are always recommended, and regular exercise helps release endorphins, which are the brain's feelgood hormones. Most importantly, if you are feeling helpless and hopeless, don't delay. Talk to your doctor. The sooner you get help, the better.

References: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolardisorder/basics/definition/con-20027544>; <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>; [http://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1879&Itemid=146](http://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1879&Itemid=146), <http://www.sadag.org/images/pdf/mdq.pdf>

The Sizwe Medical Fund Disease Management Programme provides access to chronic medication and ongoing support.

To reap the benefits please register on our Disease Management Programme at



[www.sizwe.co.za](http://www.sizwe.co.za)

or call us at



**0860 100 871**