



Champion Children's Mental Health

Early-Onset Bipolar Disorder



Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood and energy. It can make it hard for someone to carry out day-to-day tasks, such as going to school or hanging out with friends. Symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. They are different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through from time to time. They can result in damaged relationships, poor school performance and even suicide. But bipolar disorder can be treated, and people with this illness can lead full and productive lives.

Some common symptoms of bipolar disorder in children and teens are mood episodes. An overly joyful or overexcited state is called a manic episode and an extremely sad or hopeless state is called a depressive episode. Sometimes a mood episode includes symptoms of both mania and depression. This is called a mixed state. Extreme changes in energy, activity, sleep and behavior also go along with these changes in mood.

The symptoms of bipolar disorder are not like the normal changes in mood and energy that everyone has now and then. Bipolar symptoms are more extreme and tend to last for most of the day, nearly every day, for at least one week. Sometimes the symptoms of bipolar disorder are so severe that the child needs to be treated in a hospital.

Bipolar disorder tends to run in families. Children with a parent or sibling who has bipolar disorder are four to six times more likely to develop the illness, compared with children who do not have a family history of bipolar disorder.

At this time there is no way to prevent bipolar disorder. The National Institutes of Mental Health and their colleagues around the work are currently studying how to limit or delay the first symptoms in children with

Allies with Families

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Special points of interest:

- ☺ Bipolar I is the more severe form of bipolar disorder. Symptoms of both mania and depression are present.
- ☺ Bipolar II is defined by depression shifting back and forth with hypomanic episodes
- ☺ Cyclothimia is the least severe form of bipolar

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a family history of the illness.

No blood tests or brain scans can diagnose bipolar disorder. Doctors who have experience with diagnosing early-onset bipolar disorder, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, or other mental health specialists, will ask questions about changes in your child's mood. They will also ask about sleep patterns, activity or energy levels and if your child has had any other mood or behavioral disorders. The doctor may ask whether there is a family history of bipolar disorder or other psychiatric illnesses, such as depression or anxiety.

When talking to a child's doctor or mental health specialist, be sure to ask questions. Getting answers helps you understand the terms they use to describe your child's bipolar disorder. *Information from the National Institute of Mental Health, Publication No. 08-6380*

Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

Symptoms of Mania include:

Mood Changes

- Being in an overly silly or joyful mood that is unusual for your child. It is different from times when he or she might usually get silly and have fun.
- Having an extremely short temper. This is an irritable mood that is unusual.

Behavioral Changes

- Sleeping little but not feeling tired.
- Talking a lot and having racing thoughts.
- Having trouble concentrating, attention jumping from one thing to the next in an unusual way.
- Talking and thinking about sex more often.
- Behaving in risky ways more often, seeking pleasure a lot, and doing more activities than usual.

Symptoms of Depression include:

Mood Changes

- Being in a sad mood that lasts a long time.
- Losing interest in activities they once enjoyed.
- Feeling worthless or guilty.

Behavioral Changes

- Complaining about pain more often, such as headaches, stomach aches, and muscle pains.
- Eating a lot more or less and gaining or losing a lot of weight.
- Sleeping or oversleeping when these were not problems before.
- Losing energy.
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

Co-Existing Illnesses with Bipolar Disorder

Several illnesses may develop in people with bipolar disorder.

- ADHD—many children with bipolar disorder have a history of ADHD. Children with co-occurring bipolar disorder and ADHD may have difficulty concentrating and controlling their activity. This may happen even when they are not manic or depressed.
- Anxiety—anxiety disorder such as separation anxiety and generalized anxiety disorder commonly co-occur with bipolar disorder.

This may happen in both children and adults. Obsessive Compulsive Disorders can also occur with bipolar disorder.

- Substance Abuse—Adults with bipolar disorder are at very high risk of developing substance abuse. Young people with bipolar disorder may have the same risk.
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Tourette's Syndrome

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

The Childhood Bipolar Disorder Answer Book: Practical Answers to the Top 300 Questions Parents Ask by Tracy Anglada and Sheryl Hakala, M.D.

- Easy Q & A format helps parents understand their child and develop a plan for success. Explains confusing medical lingo and provides straightforward answers.



Straight Talk about Psychiatric Medications for Kids, Third Edition by Timothy E. Wilens, M.D.

- Excellent overview of common psychiatric disorders (including bipolar disorder) and medications used to treat them.

If your Adolescent Has Depression or Bipolar Disorder: An Essential Resource for Parents Dwight L. Evans M.D. and Linda Wasmer Andrews

- Essential resource for parents of teens with depression or bipolar disorder. Clearly written, practical and thoroughly up-to-date, the book focuses on specific challenges of getting the best treatment for teens.

The Bipolar Child: The Definitive and Reassuring Guide to Childhood's Most Misunderstood Disorder, Third Edition Demetri Papolos, M.D. and Janice Papolos

- Stresses the benefits of early intervention. Details some of the newest developments in the field of research and treatment as well as changes in education law.

BIPOLAR DISORDER

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) conducts ongoing research of bipolar disorder, If you are interested in participating contact NIMH at <http://patientinfo.nimh.nih.gov/>

The following are some studies that are currently ongoing:

[Studies of Brain Function and Course of Illness in Pediatric Bipolar Disorder](#). *Evaluation study.* We study the course of child bipolar illness and how brain function differs between youth with bipolar disorder, those 'at-risk,' and healthy volunteers. Ages 7-17. Location in Bethesda, MD

[Child & Adolescent Bipolar Disorder Brain Imaging and Treatment Study](#). *Evaluation study.* The National Institute of Mental Health is seeking boys and girls ages 6 to 17 with bipolar disorder who are not doing well on their current medication(s) to participate in a research study. Ages 3-17.

[Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled Trial of Riluzole in Pediatric Bipolar Disorder](#). *Interventional study.*

Pediatric Bipolar Disorder (BD) is uncommon in children. Ages 9-17. Location in Bethesda, MD

