

Ask Your Therapist

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Bipolar Disorder

Formerly known as Manic Depressive Disorder, there are 2 types of Bipolar Disorders - Bipolar I and Bipolar II.

Bipolar I is the more classic disorder where the person experiences wild mood swings, great highs and lows, often within a short period of time. The classic scenes of a bipolar manic episode are of a person running down the street tossing \$20 bills as they go, or someone cleaning out their bank account because they “know” they are going to “get lucky” at gambling or someone who stays up for 2 or 3 days working madly on a project, or someone who believes he or she is God (but not that all people are God). What then follows is the depressive episode where the person can’t get out of bed for days at a time, has no energy, feels suicidal (or ashamed for what occurred when they were manic) and they withdraw from society and their world. These swings can repeat in close succession or there can be space in between episodes. This is a very serious mental disorder and requires close medical supervision and medication to help bring down the severity of the mood swings. Not all the swings are of equal frequency or strength. Some people tend towards the manic episodes while others spend more time depressed.

Bipolar II is less obvious to spot. It can look more internal. The manic episodes are less intense and can seem more like the person is imploding or having a meltdown rather than doing some of the more public displays of mania. People with Bipolar II often overspend, have sex indiscriminately and have poor judgment about their personal choices. The depressive episodes can be just as deep and damaging as they are for people with Bipolar I but again, they seem less obvious to the casual observer. Medication is also very important to treat both Bipolar Disorders, to help people gain better impulse control and to fix the chemical imbalance within them.

The majority of my clients who have been hospitalized have had Bipolar Disorder of one kind or the other. It is a very serious disorder and requires careful professional and long-term treatment to help the person who is suffering with this disorder to cope with Life again. If you know of anyone who is suffering from Bipolar Disorder and is not getting help, please encourage them to talk with their doctor about this so that they can get the help they deserve.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.