

Bipolar Disorder I*

Definition: Bipolar Disorder I is a form of major depression. It is characterized by one or more manic episodes usually followed by a major depressive episode. This cycling between mania and depression is where the term "manic-depression" comes from. These manic episodes can last from a few days to several months and can occur with different levels of severity. Bipolar disorder I can impair day-to-day functioning.

Symptoms: Symptoms of a manic episode includes an elevated or an irritable mood lasting at least a week, plus 3 or more of the following symptoms: an inflated feeling of power, greatness or importance; needing little sleep; talking more than usual; racing thoughts; being easily distracted; intense focus on an activity or restlessness; or risky or impulsive behavior.

Causes: The cause of bipolar disorder I is unknown but genetic and environmental risk factors have been identified.

Treatment: Individuals with bipolar disorder are often treated with mood stabilizing medication and psychotherapy. People with bipolar disorder I (mania or depression) have a high risk for recurrences and usually are advised to take medicines on a continuous basis for prevention. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) may also help. Regularly scheduled therapy sessions can help identify mood destabilizers (such as lack of sleep or drug/alcohol abuse). Hospitalization could be required especially when severe manic episodes occur.

*Variations exist for Bipolar Disorder such as Bipolar Disorder II which never reaches full mania, but will also include bouts of depression and Cyclothymic Disorder which includes high and low moods, but not to the extreme.