

BIPOLAR DISORDER IN TEENS

SYMPTOMS & TREATMENT



Table of Contents:

Introduction	3
Types of Bipolar Disorder	3
Depressive Episodes in Teens	4
Manic Episodes in Teens	4
Hypomanic Episodes in Teens	5
The Causes of Bipolar Disorder in Teens	5
Risk Factors of Teens with Bipolar Disorder	6
How is Bipolar Disorder Treated?	7
Article Resources	7

Introduction

Bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) is a type of [mood disorder](#). The disorder is chronic and affects about 5.7 million adult Americans each year, according to Health Line. Bipolar disorder typically emerges in the late teen years into early adulthood, between the ages of 15 and 30 years old. Between 1994 and 2004, diagnosis of Bipolar disorder in children and teenagers increased by 40 times. Bipolar disorder is most frequently found in teens with a history of mood disorders or psychiatric problems in their family.

Unlike typical [depression](#), bipolar disorder is the brain's regulation of the fluctuation of a person's mood. According to Teen Mental Health, teens with bipolar disorder will cycle from periods of mania to periods of depression. WebMD states that these mood swings can be mild to extreme in nature.

Mania is defined as an incredibly elevated or irritable mood. [Depression](#) is the feeling of extreme lows and sadness. A teenager with bipolar disorder may swing from mania, depression, and normal levels in cycles. These cycles (also called episodes) may be frequent (daily) or infrequent (years apart).

Types of Bipolar Disorder

WebMD breaks down bipolar disorder into two subtypes: bipolar I and bipolar II:

Bipolar I: A teen with Bipolar I will bounce between the extremes of their disorder. They will go from extreme states of depression to intense forms of mania. In the manic stage the teenager may require little to no sleep for days, as they will be abnormally happy, energetic, and oftentimes quite talkative. The manic extreme may also require treatment or hospitalization as hallucinations, psychosis, delusions and paranoid rage are all common. Bipolar I is chronic, persisting throughout the teen's entire life.

Bipolar II: A teen with Bipolar II will also fluctuate between moods and emotions. However, the mania will be a less intense form known as hypomania. Teens with bipolar II may have reduced sleep or mood swings, but many will experience incredible energy and productivity. This is often associated with high achievers.

Bipolar disorder can cause teenagers to be irritable beyond the normal mood changes associated with puberty and typical teenage angst. Teenagers with bipolar disorder are more likely to experience levels of irritability that make them hostile.

According to WebMD, studies has shown there is a possible link between bipolar disorder and [ADHD](#). Approximately 57% of teens who have an adolescent-onset of bipolar disorder also have ADHD.

Depressive Episodes in Teens

An individual suffering from bipolar disorder will often cite experiencing a depressive episode before experiencing a manic one. In fact, many teens and adults will experience multiple depressive episodes before a manic episode. This is why many teens and adults are initially diagnosed as depressed rather than bipolar.

According to Teen Mental Health, depressive episodes very closely resemble experiences of an individual who has been diagnosed with depression. Depressive episodes occur nearly every day for at least two weeks and can include:

- Feeling sad and low
- Losing interest and/or pleasure in most activities
- Losing or gaining a considerable amount of weight
- Eating more or less than usual
- Difficulty sleeping or Sleeping all the time
- Restlessness or a sense of moving in slow motion
- Fatigue/Lack of Energy
- Feelings of Worthlessness
- Feelings of Guilt for no reason
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Manic Episodes in Teens

A teen or adult with Bipolar Disorder will also suffer from Manic episodes. Teen Mental Health explains that these events occur most of the day, nearly every day, for at least one week. These episodes can include:

- Inflated self-esteem
- No need for sleep
- Elevated Mood
- Extreme Optimism
- Excessive irritability
- Aggressive Behavior
- Impatience
- Rapid or confused speech
- Racing mind
- Distracted/lack of focus
- Increased in goal-directed activity
- Restlessness
- Excessive involvement in risky behavior
- Hyper sexuality
- Hallucinations

- Delusions

Hypomanic Episodes in Teens

A hypomanic episode is very similar to manic episodes, but are less severe and will not interfere with the life of a teen or adult. Because of the ‘mild’ symptoms of hypomanic episodes, teens don’t always see them as a problem. These episodes can be dangerous as, while they can oftentimes cause a person to be productive, they also spur risky behavior and negative consequences. Hypomanic episodes are more intense than life’s normal ups and downs. While they are easier for an individual to manage, they cannot easily be controlled.

WebMD cites hypomanic episodes as involving:

- Exuberant or elated mood
- High levels of confidence
- Increased Productivity
- Heightened Creative Skills
- Increased energy
- Risk-taking and Reckless behavior
- Project/Goal Focused

While adults tend to swing in moods that last for weeks or months, teens can experience incredibly short periods of mood swings. Mood swings in teens can go from mania or hypomania to depression in as little as a few hours.

Between episodes of mania or hypomania and depression, an individual will typically return to “normal” levels. For some, however, there is little to no break period between episodes.

The Causes of Bipolar Disorder in Teens

According to Teen Mental Health, less than 2 percent of people actually have bipolar disorder. It is almost as equally prevalent in women as it is in men. While bipolar symptoms often begin to manifest in the late teen years, mild symptoms are often confused with normal behaviors of being a teen.

Health Line cites several contributing factors to teen bipolar disorder. These factors include: family genes, brain structure, and environmental factors.

Family Genes: Family genetics are a major contributing factor to teenagers developing bipolar disorder. A teen whose parents or grandparents have bipolar disorder has an increased risk of developing the disorder themselves. The risk increases from 15-30% to 50-75% when both parents have bipolar disorder, according to Health Line.

Brain Structure: Studies have found that there are subtle differences in brain size and activity with individuals who have bipolar disorder and those who do not. Scientists also believe concussions or head trauma may increase the risk of development of bipolar disorder.

Environmental Factors: Doctors suggest that trauma or high levels of stress could trigger a bipolar episode. This stress could include a death in the family or tragic accident. Stress hormones in teens, and their ability to cope and handle stress effectively could also directly affect whether or not the disease emerges.

Risk Factors of Teens with Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder often does not manifest itself alone. Teens with bipolar disorder may experience other problems such as:

- [Drug addiction](#)
- [Alcohol addiction](#)
- [Conduct Disorder](#)
- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\)](#)
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\)](#)
- Panic Attacks
- Separation Anxiety
- [Anxiety Disorders](#)

These disorders and conditions may overlap with bipolar disorder, making it even more difficult to identify the disorder in your teen.

Teens and young adults suffering from bipolar disorder are prone to [suicidal thoughts and tendencies](#). It is very important to identify and recognize the warning signs of suicidal actions such as:

- Giving away cherished possessions
- Intense feelings of sadness/hopelessness
- Withdrawing from loved ones
- Loss of interest in beloved activities
- Verbalizing being 'better off dead'
- Obsessing about death or dark media

It is important to not ignore the warning signs of [self-harm](#) or [suicidal thoughts/actions](#) in your teen; especially if they suffer from Bipolar disorder.

Seek immediate help in the event of any threat of suicide. The National Suicide Prevention Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-273-8255. If you or your teen are experiencing an immediate emergency, please call 9-1-1.

How is Bipolar Disorder Treated?

Teens with bipolar disorder will often undergo therapy. Talking with a counselor or therapist can help them to better manage the symptoms of bipolar disorder. They can express their feelings and have better relationships with their peers and family. Psychiatrists may also prescribe medication to your child, based on the type of mood swings and episodes they experience.

Another option for teens with bipolar disorder is a residential therapeutic facility like Shepherds Hill Academy. Shepherds Hill Academy offers a 12 month residential program that includes: an [accredited on-site academy](#), therapeutic [wilderness program](#), individual counseling, group counseling, and equine therapy.

At Shepherds Hill Academy we work with you, the parent, to set goals for your teen. Our [certified therapy staff](#) work to serve your teen through [individual counseling](#) and group therapy sessions. There is also family counseling available.

Equine therapy is extremely helpful for teens suffering from bipolar disorder. The program teaches teens healthy problem solving skills, anger management, healthy goal setting, communication skills, and fosters personal responsibility, friendship, and companionship.

Shepherds Hill Academy is dedicated to offering hope and healing to your teen in crisis. Call us or [inquire online](#) to find out more about how Shepherds Hill Academy can help your teen with bipolar disorder.

Article Resources:

- Scaccia, Annamaria, March 16,2016, How to Recognize and Treat Bipolar Disorder in Teens, Retrieved from:
<http://www.healthline.com/health/bipolar-disorder/bipolar-disorder-in-teens#1>
- Teen Mental Health, Bipolar Disorder, Retrieved from:
<http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/bipolar-disorder/>
- WebMD Medical Reference, January 20, 2017, Teens and Bipolar Disorder, Retrieved from:
<http://teens.webmd.com/bipolar-disorder-and-teens#1>