

What can you do about bipolar disorder?

The best way to help people with bipolar disorder is to use both medicine and counseling. Counseling is talking to a doctor or other worker with special training.

Medicine – Most people with bipolar disorder take medicine called “mood stabilizers”. These stop mood swings. People may also take medicine to keep them from getting too sad. It takes several weeks for these to work well.

Counseling – A person with bipolar disorder usually sees a doctor or counselor with special training. The doctor or counselor helps a person see what makes them have an episode. An episode is what we call the time when a person has mood swings. The doctor or counselor also helps find ways to deal with stress.

Hospital visit – Sometimes people need to go to the hospital for special treatment.

Self-care – People and their families should learn all they can about bipolar disorder. It helps to ask family and friends to watch for warning signs and to call the doctor if an episode is starting. A person should not stop using their medicine, even if they are feeling better. They should also not use street drugs or alcohol because these can trigger a bipolar episode.

For more information

<http://www.vch.ca/mentalhealth>
or CONTACT:



Aboriginal Mental Health Program

604-675-2551 x 22240

Mental Health

Adults - Intake
Access and Assessment Centre (AAC)
604-875-8289

Children and Youth - Intake
604-675-3895

Older Adults - Intake
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Bipolar Disorder

A Guide for the First Nations Community



This guide answers some questions about bipolar disorder

What is bipolar disorder?

People with bipolar disorder have mood swings. This means they go from feeling very happy (mania) to very sad (depression). They often feel normal in between. These mood swings are not normal for what is going on in their lives.

Bipolar disorder usually starts in the late teens or early twenties. We don't know how to cure it. It can be managed with special medicine and support.

Do aboriginal people get bipolar disorder more than others?

No. It affects everyone the same. People from all races and cultures get it, and it doesn't matter how much money you have.

What causes bipolar disorder?

We don't really know what causes it. It can run in families. Bad parenting or being poor does NOT cause it.

People with bipolar disorder are more sensitive to stress like something difficult happening in their life (a death in the family, for example). They are also more sensitive to things like the use of street drugs or not enough sleep. This is because some nerves in the brain don't always work properly.

How do people with bipolar disorder act?

This is not the same for everyone. Some people have it worse than others. A person can suffer for only a few days or for months. This list shows things you might see in a person with bipolar disorder:

Mania

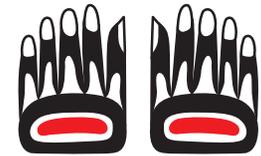
- They feel really good.
- They think they can do more than they are really able to.
- They talk very fast and have racing thoughts.
- They have too much energy.
- Their senses (hearing, seeing) are very sensitive.
- They don't make good decisions and do dangerous things.
- They have trouble paying attention and often can't sleep.

Depression

- They feel sad, guilty, and hopeless.
- They don't have much energy and aren't interested in doing very much.
- They don't eat and sleep normally.
- They have trouble paying attention.
- They often think about suicide.

How do you find out if you have bipolar disorder?

People with bipolar disorder often don't realize they are sick. Friends and family can be really helpful. Often, they can see that their loved one is having trouble. They can also ask the person to get help. Most people with bipolar disorder are happy they got help, even if they didn't want it at first. They usually get worse if they don't get help.



A doctor will talk to a person to see if they have bipolar disorder. The doctor will ask questions to see if the person shows any signs like those listed above. Bipolar disorder can be hard to figure out because there may be other reasons a person shows these signs. The doctor will figure out if the problem is bipolar disorder or something else, like depression or alcohol or drug use. It helps when people are not using drugs or alcohol when a doctor is checking them for bipolar disorder. A person might have a different problem or might have more than one problem at the same time as bipolar disorder.

