



BIPOLAR DISORDER

WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder is also known as manic depressive psychosis. It is characterised by extreme mood swings between mania and depression which affects social and occupational functioning.

Bipolar disorder affects less than 1% of the population. The exact cause is unknown, but it occurs more frequently in relatives of people with bipolar disorder and depression. It is a chronic illness that requires long-term treatment, and the risk of relapse could be as high as 87% if treatment is stopped.

SYMPTOMS

Mania is characterised by symptoms including a very elevated mood associated with:

- Hyperactivity
- Racing thoughts
- Talking excessively
- Grandiose ideas and beliefs in one's abilities
- Easily distracted
- Little need for sleep
- High energy level despite the lack of sleep
- Poor judgment and increased impulsivity
- Increased irritability and poor temper control
- Reckless behaviour and lack of self-control
- Binge eating, drinking, and/or drug use
- Sex with many partners (promiscuity)
- Spending sprees, often leading to debts

Depression is characterised by symptoms including:

- Persistent low mood or sadness
- Loss of interest and inability to derive pleasure from activities previously enjoyed
- Loss of self-esteem
- Impaired concentration and poor memory
- Feeling worthless, hopeless, or guilty
- Appetite disturbances: loss of appetite and weight loss
- Overeating and weight gain
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Thoughts of death and suicide

TREATMENT

Treatment usually includes medications, psychotherapy or a combination of both.

Electroconvulsive therapy is prescribed for selected patients.

PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.®

SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre

Singapore General Hospital • Changi General Hospital • Sengkang General Hospital • KK Women's and Children's Hospital
National Cancer Centre Singapore • National Dental Centre Singapore • National Heart Centre Singapore
National Neuroscience Institute • Singapore National Eye Centre • SingHealth Community Hospitals • SingHealth Polyclinics

MEDICATIONS

Mood stabilisers are the first-line of treatment and the options include:

- Lithium
- Sodium Valproate
- Lamotrigine (to treat bipolar depression)

Antipsychotic and anti-anxiety medications may be prescribed.

Antidepressant medications are usually prescribed in combination with mood stabilisers to treat depression in bipolar disorder.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is useful for patients experiencing interpersonal difficulties, conflicts & cognitive distortions. It is usually started once acute symptoms of the disorder have settled.

Psychotherapy is often used in combination with medication to help patients and their families understand the disorder.

Psychotherapy can help improve one's compliance with treatment resulting in lower relapse rates.

ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY (ECT)

ECT may be prescribed to treat mania or depression in bipolar disorder if treatment response to medication is poor or when the condition is severe and potentially life-threatening (eg. severe suicidality or refusal to eat and drink).

ECT is a safe and effective form of treatment that involves the controlled induction of seizures for therapeutic purposes. It is performed under general anaesthesia to ensure comfortable treatment.