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BIPOLAR DISORDER

What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a condition that affects mainly mood. The word bipolar has two parts: Bi meaning 'two' and Polar meaning 'completely opposite'. The term bipolar refers to the way mood can change between two very different states – mania and depression. Bipolar disorder used to be called manic depression, but this term is not used any more. Some medical professionals may also use the term bipolar 'affective disorder'. 'Affective' means that the disorder relates to mood or emotions.

If someone has bipolar disorder, they are likely to have times where they experience:

- Manic or hypomanic episodes – feeling high
- Depressive episodes – feeling low
- Potentially some psychotic symptoms during manic or depressive episodes.

These experiences are also termed mood episodes or states and they usually last for at least a few days or weeks. Depending on the way these moods are experienced, and how severely they have an effect, a medical professional may diagnose a particular type of bipolar disorder.

Mood episodes can range from severe depression to mania, and anything in between. Sometimes episodes may feel intense and other times someone may feel stable. And some people may never experience certain mood episodes. For example, not everyone with bipolar disorder will experience mania.

We all have changes in our mood, but in bipolar disorder these changes can feel very distressing and have a big impact on life.

Someone may feel that their high and low moods are extreme, and that swings in mood are overwhelming. And they may feel and behave very differently, depending on mood. This can be difficult and confusing. These swings in mood are sometimes called mood episodes or mood states. Not everyone experiences mood episodes in the same way or for the same amount of time.