

BIPOLAR DISORDER FACT SHEET

Background

Children and teenagers with Bipolar Disorder have manic and/or depressive symptoms. Some may have mostly depression and others a combination of manic and depressive symptoms. Highs may alternate with lows.

Research has improved the ability to diagnose Bipolar Disorder in children and teens. Bipolar Disorder can begin in childhood and during the teenage years, although it is usually diagnosed in adult life. The illness can affect anyone. However, if one or both parents have Bipolar Disorder, the chances are greater that their children may develop the disorder. Family history of drug or alcohol abuse also may be associated with greater risk for Bipolar Disorder.

Treatment

Teenagers with Bipolar Disorder can be effectively treated. Treatment for Bipolar Disorder usually includes education of the patient and the family about the illness, mood stabilizing medications such as lithium, valproic acid, or "atypical antipsychotic", and psychotherapy. Mood stabilizing medications often reduce the number and severity of manic episodes, and also help to prevent depression. Psychotherapy helps the child understand themselves, adapt to stresses, rebuild self-esteem and improve relationships.

Manic Symptoms can include:

- Severe changes in mood, either unusually happy or silly, or very irritable, angry, agitated or aggressive
- Unrealistic highs in self-esteem
- Great increase in energy and the ability to go with little or no sleep for days without feeling tired
- Increase in talking- too fast or too much
- Distractibility
- Repeated high risk taking behavior, such as reckless driving or abusing alcohol and drugs

Depressive Symptoms can

include:

- Irritability, depressed mood, sadness, frequent crying
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Loss of enjoyment in favorite activities
- Frequent complaints of physical illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches
- Low energy level
- A major change in eating or sleeping patterns

