



A Simple Explanation of Bipolar Disorder

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Imagine that each of us has a horizontal line that represents our moods. A "flat line" would symbolize a steady and unwavering mood that is always the same without the variation of healthy emotions which are unique to man. But living life on the line without variation isn't reality.

We all have days when our mood makes a slight loop above the line and days when the loop goes below the line. A birthday celebration may cause an upward loop while a loss would result in a downward loop.

Bipolar Disorder is a condition in which an individual experiences moods where the loops rise or drop significantly above and below the line. When the loop is far above the line we describe the mood as "manic" and when it is far below the line we describe the mood as "depressed". Years ago, this disorder was called "Manic-Depressive" but, more recently has been renamed to indicate that there are two opposite poles or extremes and therefore the term "Bipolar". The word "Disorder" indicates that "dis"-ease has disputed the expected "order" of the mood.

Those who are "manic" tend to experience either elated or agitated moods that result in little need for sleep, risk-taking behaviours and an unrealistic sense of self. Because people who have Bipolar Disorder often believe that "mania" is the "normal" and "desired" mood, they tend to not want to move closer to the line with medication or treatment. The result is that they often stay in a state of mania until their minds and bodies are exhausted. They then usually plunge well below the line to a depressed state where they can find themselves immobilized, unable to care for their daily needs, or requiring hospitalization.

When the client is manic they might not want treatment because they feel invincible and when they are depressed they might not be able to access treatment because they feel helpless.

The rise and fall in Bipolar Disorder can be triggered by a number of factors and may occur quite suddenly. At times, the mood swings can occur quite rapidly and be difficult to treat.

Bipolar II is a disorder similar to the above but with highs and lows that are less pronounced. It is therefore more difficult to diagnose. There has been considerable discussion over the years about whether children can or should be diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. Many of the symptoms are similar to behaviours which are evidenced during the "growing up" years and this can cause a great deal of confusion.

Because of the complexity of Bipolar Disorder, it is important that diagnosis and treatment is provided through a competent professional. Those who have symptoms of Bipolar Disorder generally seek the services of psychiatrists and Clinical Psychologists. Their family members can also benefit through group or individual therapy as well as educational programs offered in community or mental health settings

The popular actress Patty Duke and her psychiatrist Gloria Hochman have co-written an interesting book about her illness that is entitled "A Brilliant

Madness". www.pattyduke.blogspot.com also offers supplemental information through the *Patty Duke Online Center for Mental Wellness*.

If you have any questions about this topic, do not hesitate to contact a health professional who will provide you with appropriate resources or referrals.

The good news is that Bipolar Disorder is a treatable illness and many people do extremely well in managing it so that they have full and satisfying lives.