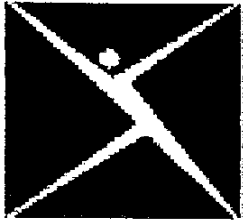


UNDERSTANDING



The Canadian Mental Health Association is a community based mental health service that provides support to people who have experienced mental health issues and their families and friends. These information sheets have been created by people in the community including individuals who have experienced mental health issues, family members and mental health practitioners. We recognize that there are many different perspectives about mental health issues and encourage people to increase their understanding by learning from a variety of sources. Hopefully, these information sheets will assist in raising community awareness and promote greater UNDERSTANDING of mental health issues.

MANIC DEPRESSION/BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER

What Is Bipolar Affective Disorder?

Bipolar Affective Disorder, also known as Manic Depression, is a medical diagnosis characterized by wide mood alterations, with periods of both depression and mania. A person experiencing depression or mania may have intense mood swings and changes in thinking and behaviour. Bipolar means sharing two poles (high and low) and Affective Disorder means a disorder having to do with mood. In most cases, the high pole is experienced as mania and the low pole experienced as depression.

What Causes Bipolar Affective Disorder?

Any person can develop Bipolar Affective Disorder; however, studies indicate that highly creative, sensitive people, people tending to be perfectionists and high achievers, have a higher prevalence of bipolar affective disorder. Biological factors seem to play a major role in producing Bipolar Affective Disorder. A person's personality make-up and/or stresses in the environment (for example, death of a loved one, separation, divorce, etc.) may also play a part in bringing on depressive or manic states.

How Many People Are Affected And What Are The Symptoms?

It is estimated that 1% of the population will experience a Bipolar Affective Disorder. The symptoms of Bipolar Affective Disorder manifest with the individual experiencing episodes of mania or elation followed by low mood or depression. The number of manic and depressive episodes varies greatly from person to person and most individuals experience level or balanced periods between their manic and depressive episodes.

Manic depression can send a person plunging from a high state, where one may believe one has superhuman energy and abilities, into a pit of despair, where it may seem as if the only out is suicide. The symptoms of depression and mania are described separately but a person diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder experiences both states at different times in their life.

Manic State:

A person feels total "euphoria" and strength. However, in the early stages of the episode, the person may appear to be more sociable, active, talkative, self-confident, perceptive, and creative than usual. As his/her mood elevates, he or she may experience, but not necessarily be aware of some or all of the following:

- Increased strength and energy, decreased sleep
- Extreme irritability
- Rapid, unpredictable emotional changes
- Uncontrollable racing thoughts, flight of ideas
- Increased interest in activities, overspending
- Grandiosity, inflated self-esteem
- Increased and uninhibited sexual drive
- Poor judgement

Depressive State:

The chief symptom is a sad, despairing mood, which may be accompanied by an extreme sense of some or all of the following:

- Lack of energy
- Sleep problems where a person may sleep too much or too little
- Loss of interest in work, family, and friends
- Change in eating habits
- Preoccupation with failures or inadequacies
- Loss of self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt
- Excessive concern about physical complaints
- Decreased sexual drive
- Crying easily, suicidal, and occasional homicidal thoughts

What Are The Approaches to Recovery?

There is no cure for manic depression at present, but many people have benefited from the use of monitored medication programs; it is sometimes possible to smooth out and reduce the frequency of the highs and lows, and in some cases the episodes may be altogether prevented. Whatever the recommended treatment, it is important to be informed. If you are not certain about treatment, ask questions.

There may be things that you can do to help yourself or your loved one recover from depression. Some approaches that may be helpful include:

- Exploring counselling, therapy, or self-help groups
- Exploring Alternative Therapies
- Maintaining a health lifestyle
- Support from people who are understanding

Taking the opportunity to put feelings into words can be helpful. Listening and understanding can bring tremendous comfort to someone with depression.

Source: Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division

This information is of a general nature. More comprehensive information can be obtained through the Canadian Mental Health Association, Durham Region Branch

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