

Contact us

For further information or advice contact a member of staff
or

Bipolar UK

provides support, advice and information for people with bipolar disorder, their friends and carers.

Tel: **0333 323 3880**

email: info@bipolaruk.org

For information on Trust services visit

www.awp.nhs.uk

PALS

To make a comment, raise a concern or make a complaint, please contact the Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

Tel: 01225 362900

Freephone: 0800 073 1778

Email: awp.pals@nhs.net

Other formats and languages

If you need this information in other formats (such as large print, Braille) or in another language, please call the PALS number.

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Avon and Wiltshire
Mental Health Partnership
NHS Trust

Bipolar Disorder

Also known as Bipolar Affective Disorder or Manic Depression

Some information about this mental health condition for older adults, family members and carers.

you matter, we care

Introduction

Bipolar Disorder, perhaps more commonly known as 'Manic Depression', is a relatively common mental health condition affecting one in a hundred men and women. It usually occurs for the first time in early adulthood.

Bipolar Disorder (BD) is a serious condition that brings many challenges for those affected. However, a number of artists, poets and writers attribute some of their creativity to BD.

What is Bipolar Disorder?

BD is a mental health condition characterised by swings in mood over a period of time, typically from periods of high energy, activity and elation to periods of depression and possible thoughts of self-harm, before swinging back again. There may be a mixture of feelings of depression and restlessness.

Whilst periods of high energy can be very productive, changes in a person's normal judgement can lead to uncharacteristic behaviour such as making expensive purchases or being socially uninhibited. An affected person may also experience unusual thoughts not based on reality.

In contrast, the time spent feeling very depressed can be associated with social isolation and withdrawal, self-neglect and profound distress. This may lead to thoughts of self-harm.

What causes it?

The causes of BD are poorly understood, but it can run in families. It may be a result of problems with the chemical balance in the brain, or it may be a result of stress. It can be a combination of all of these.

Treatment options

One of the most important things to do is to understand the illness and what it means. Older people with BD may well have had it for a long time and so will have a lot of experience of it. Learning to monitor mood is important.

Treatment is aimed at keeping a constant and stable mood and treating the mania or depression.

- Mania is usually treated with antipsychotic medication and this generally starts to work within a number of days.
- Depression is usually treated with antidepressants, but these take a number of weeks to be fully effective.
- The most common 'mood stabiliser' is lithium. This is usually a very effective treatment, but it requires close monitoring by your consultant.
- Talking therapies, monitoring your own mood, caring for yourself and your relationships, avoiding stress if possible and taking your medications consistently are all very useful things that you can do for yourself.