

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Disorder



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Bipolar disorder causes huge changes in a person's mood, energy, and ability to think clearly. It has high moods called mania and low moods called depression. Although bipolar disorder can develop anytime, the average age is 25. It is rarer for bipolar disorder to be diagnosed in children and teenagers, however some children as young as 6 are diagnosed.

What are the symptoms?

It can be difficult to separate signs of bipolar disorder with signs of attention deficient hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). A person with bipolar disorder may have very high or very low moods. Some signs of bipolar disorder are:

- **Mania.** Mania is a very high mood. Some signs of mania that happen in cases of bipolar disorder that typically do not happen in cases of ADHD are:
 - Difficulty sleeping or not being tired
 - Jumping from topic to topic very quickly
 - Taking huge risks, especially physically
 - Grandiose behaviors or acting as if rules do not apply to them.
 - Acting extremely happy or laughing hysterically without a reason.
- **Depression:** Depression is a low mood. It can make it hard for people to live their daily life. Some signs of depression are:
 - Feeling very sad
 - Feeling very tired or sleeping a lot
 - Feeling angry, guilty, or worthless
 - Eating too much or too little
 - Not being interested in fun activities
 - Thoughts of death or suicide

Treatment

There are typically three types of medications used to treat bipolar disorder for adults and children. Health care providers must use their best judgement with each child to find a combination of medication and other treatments that works best for them. It is very important that children on these medications be monitored for the development of serious side effects. It is also important to let a child's teacher know of their diagnosis so that special arrangements can be made to support their learning.

Some of the medications used to treat bipolar disorder, as well as some of the complications that children can experience are:

- Lithium: Some who take lithium over a long period of time will need thyroid supplements or may develop serious kidney disease.
- Anticonvulsants: One medication (Depakote) may cause weight gain and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).
- Atypical neuroleptics: extreme weight gain and complications from gaining weight (such as higher risk for diabetes, heart problems, etc.)

In addition, all these medications may cause an illness called tardive dyskinesia (which is characterized by random movements of different muscles within the body).

