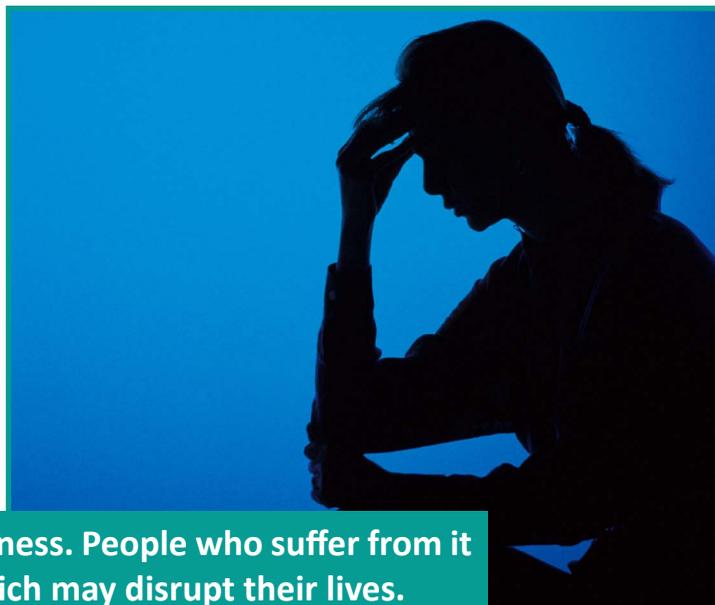


What is bipolar disorder?



Bipolar disorder is a serious mental illness. People who suffer from it go through unusual mood swings, which may disrupt their lives.

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that causes severe mood swings including emotional highs and lows, and affects your sleep, energy, and behaviour. During these mood swings, also known as manic episodes, bipolar sufferers will often behave uncharacteristically and others will notice a difference in their behaviour.

Symptoms

People who experience symptoms during emotional highs (manic episodes) may:

- Feel euphoric.
- Have high energy levels.
- Struggle to sleep.
- Behave impulsively, e.g. spend lots of money or have reckless sex.
- Talk and think very fast.
- Become agitated or irritated.
- Make ambitious and unrealistic plans.
- In some cases, experience hallucinations or delusions, e.g. they may believe they're famous or have special powers.

People who experience symptoms during emotional lows (depressive episodes) may:

- Feel very sad, empty, or hopeless.
- Have low energy levels.
- Sleep too little or too much.
- Eat too little or too much.
- Struggle to concentrate.
- Lose interest in activities they normally enjoy.
- Experience hallucinations or delusions.
- Think about suicide or death.

Risk factors

The exact cause of bipolar is unknown. However, your genes, family history, any drug and alcohol abuse, traumatic experiences, brain-chemical imbalances, and hormonal problems may increase your risk for this disorder.

Diagnosis

There are different types of bipolar and related disorders and symptoms, and the severity thereof may vary. If you experience any symptoms of mania or depression, it's important to see your doctor for a proper diagnosis. Your doctor will complete a physical exam to rule out other possible causes. If you don't suffer from other conditions, they will conduct a mental health evaluation. They may also refer you to a mental health professional, like a psychiatrist.

Treatment

Medication and cognitive therapy can help control the symptoms. Without proper treatment, bipolar disorder can disrupt your life by possibly causing you to end up in financial, legal, or relationship trouble during manic episodes, or it may leave you worn out and suicidal during depressive episodes. It's crucial to get help in order to live a healthy and balanced life.

For further information, contact your employee wellbeing programme or the South African Depression and Anxiety Group helpline on 0800 12 13 14.