

# THE UPS AND DOWNS OF BIPOLAR MOOD DISORDER

## WHAT IS BIPOLAR MOOD DISORDER?

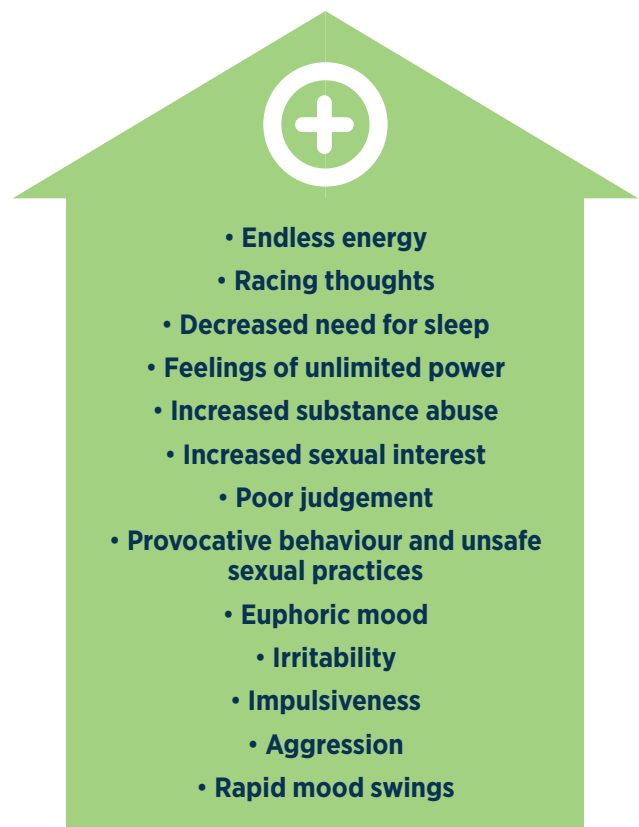
Bipolar mood disorder is more than just experiencing mixed feelings or being moody. It is a combination of experiencing extreme highs and/or lows related to your mood and is categorised as manic and hypomanic episodes.



During the period described as mania or an extreme high, a person may experience an abnormally elevated or irritable mood lasting at least one week. During this time the person's interactions with friends or at school may be significantly impaired with at least three of the following symptoms:

As your feelings suddenly start to increase, you could experience emotions such as the illustration below<sup>1</sup>:

- A very inflated self esteem
- Requiring very little sleep
- Racing thoughts and/or inability to calm down your mind
- Being very easily distracted
- Feeling as if you need to accomplish a lot of things all at once
- Feeling as if you need to move all of the time
- Feelings of irritability
- Trying to do as many things as possible that bring you pleasure but with a potential to harm yourself such as having a lot of sex, drinking a lot of alcohol or taking a lot of drugs
- You can also experience hallucinations – where you see, smell or hear things that are not perceived by other people. Sometimes you could have a sensation of tasting something that isn't really there, typically an unpleasant flavour or experience an abnormal or false sensation of touch or feelings of movement on the skin or inside the body.



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Hypomania is a less extreme form of mania and often times has lower impacts on your functioning. You may still feel on top of the world and you might not recognise the changes in your life. Your close friends or family may take notice that your behaviour is excessive and usual. You might experience racing thoughts, needing to speak very quickly, feeling like you are everyone's boss, feeling that you need to dress in a very flashy or revealing way, becoming extremely irritable or having the extreme desire to do many things in a very short space of time.

Some people might experience feelings of both mania and depression every day, for nearly one week at a time. This is called mixed episodes. They sometimes feel very irritated, unable to sleep, with extreme changes to their appetite and thinking about hurting themselves or experiencing hallucinations<sup>1</sup>.

**What we can do is to support each other and reach out for help if you have experienced more than one of these symptoms above or if your close friends and family have told you that they have been worried about your behaviour.**

**Reference:** 2012. Abnormal psychology: A South African perspective. Cape Town: Oxford University Press. Edited by Burke 560Pp.

This infographic does not cover every aspect of mental health. Consult a doctor or your nearest emergency unit if you are concerned about your own or a loved one's mental health. The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a qualified healthcare professional. E&OE.

In contrast to the very high feelings, some people experience extreme lows – also known as depressive episodes. Your feelings could include the following:

- Depressed mood
  - Anxiety
- Lack of appetite or excessive appetite
  - Restlessness
- Self-doubts or feeling worthless
  - Persistent sadness
  - Suicidal thoughts
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Inability to function at work or school
  - Difficulty in making decisions
  - Empty feelings
  - Loss of energy
  - Restlessness

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

It is important to note that bipolar mood disorder, such as any other mental illness needs to be diagnosed and treated by a qualified healthcare professional, such as a psychiatrist. Most of us might experience many of these feelings listed above such as feeling overjoyed when your team wins a match, being heartbroken when you break up with a boyfriend/girlfriend or finding it difficult to sleep when you are stressed about a test. This does not mean that you have a mental illness and therefore we cannot judge or tell our friends that they have a mental illness when they have one or more of these symptoms.

**To find out more, contact 011 219 9626 / 9620 or email [mentalhealth.headoffice@lifehealthcare.co.za](mailto:mentalhealth.headoffice@lifehealthcare.co.za)**