

KidsHealth

Bipolar Disorder

Imagine being so full of energy that you feel you might bounce off the walls. You're so full of zillions of different thoughts that you think your head might split right open. You're so full of different feelings buzzing around inside that you don't know what to focus on first.

And then, without warning, you crash land. You feel so bad that everything seems dark and heavy. You can't even imagine dragging yourself out of bed. Nothing feels good, and you're certain that you're stuck in this black hole forever. But then you flip back to the super-high-energy mood. Later, you crash again. You never know when you'll feel one way or the other. And there's not a lot of "everything's OK" in between.

This is what it can be like for people who have bipolar disorder, a serious but treatable condition that both kids and adults can get. Sometimes known as manic depression, bipolar disorder is rare, but until it is treated people who have it can't control their moods as they swing from peak to bleak.

Sure, we all have days when we feel "off." Maybe the soccer game was rained out, or the test was tougher than expected, or we just can't figure out what to do with ourselves. We might say we have the blahs, or the blues, or that we're depressed. But there's a difference between feeling depressed and having an actual medical condition called depression. A person who has bipolar disorder flip-flops back and forth between the low lows of depression and very energetic, high highs, also called mania.

The Brain and Moods

Your brain is the control center for all the amazing workings of your body and mind - including your moods and behavior. For someone with bipolar disorder, the brain has trouble keeping control of moods. It is believed that certain genes are at least partly responsible for this problem. People are more likely to develop bipolar disorder if they have inherited certain genes from parents. That's why bipolar disorder, like other kinds of depression, runs in families.

Still, not everyone with a relative who has bipolar disorder will have it themselves. If someone has a certain genetic makeup, experiencing abuse or a terrible loss might make it more likely that bipolar disorder will develop. But someone with bipolar disorder shouldn't be blamed for having this condition. It's not the person's fault.

People with bipolar disorder may realize their moods are swinging from very high, to very low, but they don't know why these shifts happen or when the next one will occur. Kids with bipolar disorder may have these dramatic shifts a lot, even several times an hour.

Important Tip!

Everyone has ups and downs, but if you think that you or someone you know has serious problems with sadness or moods, tell a parent or other trusted adult.

It's important to see a doctor soon.

Did you know?

People who have bipolar disorder...