



CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE  
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# Fact Sheet

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## **MANIC DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS (BIPOLAR AFFECTIVE DISORDER)**

Although this Fact Sheet was created with input from consumers of mental health services, psychologists and psychiatrists, the information is of a general nature. More comprehensive information can be obtained from libraries, including Ontario Division, and your local CMHA branch.

### **WHAT IS MANIC DEPRESSION?**

Manic depression involves wide mood alterations, with periods of both depression and mania. A person experiencing depression or mania may have intense mood swings and consequent changes in thinking and behaviour. The term that is professionally used for the illness is Bipolar Affective Disorder. Bipolar means sharing two poles (high and low) and Affective Disorder means disorder having to do with mood.

### **WHAT CAUSES MANIC DEPRESSION & WHO ARE THE PEOPLE AT RISK?**

The cause is not known. Any person can develop manic depression, however studies indicate that highly creative, sensitive people, people tending to be perfectionists and high achievers, have a higher incidence of bipolar affective disorder. Although biological factors seem to play a major role in producing the illness, a person's personality make up and/or stresses in the environment may also play a part in bringing on an acute episode.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED & WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**

It is estimated that 1% of the population will have a manic depressive illness. Environmental factors such as death, separation and divorce may trigger the disorder. The illness manifests itself with the individual experiencing episodes of mania or elation followed by low mood or depression. The number of manic and depressive episodes varies greatly from person to person and most individuals experience "normal" periods between their manic and depressive episodes.

Manic depression can send a person plunging from a high state, where one may believe one has superhuman energy and abilities, into a pit of despair, where it may seem as if the only way out is suicide. In fact, however, there are very effective treatments available. The symptoms of depression

and mania are described separately:

**Depression state:** The chief symptom is a sad, despairing mood, which may be accompanied by some or all the following, depending on the severity of the illness:

- Lack of energy
- Sleep problems where a person may sleep too much or too little
- Loss of interest in work, family and friends
- Change in eating habits
- Preoccupation with failure or inadequacies
- Loss of self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt
- Excessive concern about physical complaints
- Decreased sexual drive
- Crying easily, suicidal and occasional homicidal thoughts

**Manic State:** A person feels total “euphoria” and strength. However, in the early stages of the illness, the person may appear to be more sociable, active, talkative, self-confident, perceptive and creative than usual. As his/her mood elevates, he or she may experience some or all of the following:

- Increased strength and energy, decreased sleep
- Extreme irritability
- Rapid, unpredictable emotional changes
- Racing thoughts, flight of ideas
- Increased interest in activities, overspending
- Grandiosity, inflated self esteem
- Increased sexual drive
- Poor judgement

## **WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS?**

There is no real cure for manic depression at present, but through the use of monitored medication programs it is possible to smooth out and reduce the frequency of the highs and lows, and in some cases episodes are altogether prevented. Some factors that determine the type of treatment are the nature of the symptoms and also the number of previous episodes, severity and duration of the illness and previous response to treatments. Counselling and therapy can be helpful. Self help support groups can be very beneficial. Whatever the recommended treatment, it is important to be informed. If you are not certain about treatment, ask questions.

## **WHERE CAN I GET HELP?**

Remember you are not alone. Reaching out for help and knowing where to go for positive support can help a person recover from their negative state of crisis. You may want to contact your family physician, your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association or the Depressive and Manic Depressive Association of Ontario.