

Bipolar and Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



Bipolar disorder affects more than five million Americans. One study shows that someone with bipolar disorder is fifteen times more likely to attempt or actually commit suicide. The way bipolar typically shows is people have extreme highs which are called manic phases or extreme lows which is the depressive state. This all depends on if you have bipolar one or two. So what are the differences between the two? The difference is that people with bipolar one suffer at least one fully manic episode while people with bipolar two suffer from only hypomanic episodes which are less severe than manic episodes.

There are also studies that show some people that are suffering from bipolar might be exhibiting these symptoms solely for the fact that they are using and it encourages these signs and symptoms to show themselves.

One of the first things that need to happen in order to help people is getting a proper diagnosis from a trained professional. Unfortunately, this disorder is often underdiagnosed or overdiagnosed. Sometimes this is misdiagnosed because they share signs and symptoms of other disorders. Having the ability to intervene early can help the results dramatically more positive.

Many of us addicts suffer from co-occurring mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and mood disorders. From addictioncenter.com "in a survey done 50% of people suffer from bipolar and substance abuse issues." In this article, we will be focusing on bipolar disorder. It is something quite common in the addiction community and it needs to be addressed more than it is right now. It is common for people with mental health issues to abuse drugs or alcohol to self-medicate and treat the symptoms.

So what do we need to learn in order to help ourselves? I think it's important to know all the signs and symptoms of the disease. Having these issues can be a dangerous thing. Here are some of the signs and symptoms of the phases of bipolar disorder:

For a depressed phase:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Can't sit still
- No longer doing activities that you once enjoyed
- Trouble concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness

For a manic phase:

- Having energy even though lacking proper sleep
- Delusions of grandeur
- A sense of guilt
- Lack of sleep
- Feelings of guilt
- Bouts of anger

And for both these episodes, there are more signs and symptoms. These were just a few of them. Since these also mirror some of the signs and symptoms of substance abuse it can be difficult to diagnose and distinguish between the two. How are you to tell the difference when they can be so similar to each other? The answer to that question is that it is quite hard to tell the difference between the two. These episodes can happen only on rare occasions or maybe a few times per year and could last for an unpredictable amount of time.

People with bipolar disorder change their moods extremely fast. It's an unpredictable disorder. Sometimes it can take a bit for something to really affect us that much that our mood changes, but sometimes we can swing from one mood to the other extremely fast. Sometimes there will be certain signs and symptoms showing themselves but there are often times that these episodes feel like they come out of nowhere, completely unexpected.

Drugs and alcohol dramatically affect someone's mood that has bipolar. Many times it depends on what drugs someone is using depending on whether they are manic or depressed. Many people will use stimulants when they are in a manic state and then other times when they are depressed they will be using things like benzos and alcohol. All too often people suffering are misdiagnosed. Many times this is simply from a lack of experience in this area as someone might be having drug-induced mental health issues.

Things like this can lead to misdiagnosis. Many people try to quit using drugs or alcohol only to then go through withdrawal symptoms similar to that of a depressed state and when they are on drugs or alcohol it resembles a manic state. They can be extremely hard to pick up on for a doctor or therapist unless the person is honest and upfront with them.

Bipolar has the highest rate of comorbidities including OCD, ADHD, anxiety disorders and cardiovascular disorders. This is a reason why when you seek treatment for your disorder it is important to try and seek

out someone who has experience treating multiples diagnoses. This will ensure you get the best treatment possible. This is typically a mixture of medication and different types of therapies.

I think once you identify that you are suffering from a dual diagnosis it is important to go and find resources specifically meant for people suffering from this issue. As of right now that are not a ton of institutions prepared to handle this situation. While there might not be many of them they are out there and all you have to do is a little research to help yourself.

So how do we go about trying to live a normal life? I think the first thing is looking out for the signs and symptoms of a possible manic or depressed episode that is on the way. Every day you get up to assess your mood and how you're currently feeling. In essence, take an inventory of your feelings and emotions daily. I can't stress enough how important this is. You need to study yourself and your thought process if you are to get better.

One major factor in this is that suicide is something that happens all too often when people go untreated. I think it is very important to also seek some type of professional help. Reading about this yourself and educating yourself can only take you so far. A professional might help you overcome barriers and make your progress much easier.

Bipolar disorder has no cure at the moment, only ways to manage the symptoms. And getting the right treatment means having the right diagnosis. Everything begins with the proper diagnosis. Sometimes besides substance use disorders bipolar can also have quite similar symptoms to ADD/ADHD and depression. Than the medications that are prescribed for the wrong diagnosis can actually worsen the bipolar symptoms. So it is absolutely crucial that you see a professional that has experience in this field that can give you a proper diagnosis.

So what are the treatment options available? As of right now there are two main ways that people are commonly treated. One is with medication and the other is with therapy such as cognitive behavioral therapy(CBT). Both treatments have been shown to be quite affective. Some people respond positively to both and some may use one or the other and that helps them in what they need. There are also inpatient and outpatient programs that can help you long in your recovery. These have also been shown to help people progress along the path of recovery.

There are many resources available to help you. There are the inpatient and outpatient programs, support groups, step programs and professional help as well as far as therapists, psychiatrists or psychologists. You are the only person that can decide what is going to work best for you. It might

be choosing one thing to focus on or maybe you work on a combination of these. No matter what you choose it has to work for you. If it doesn't than you can move on and try another way. There are many ways to recovery you just need to discover which way you're going to take and which way will work best for you.

In the end you have to learn to love yourself and live with yourself. Self-love is where your sobriety starts, without self-love there will be no reason to get sober. You also need to do the research and see what route you can take to achieve your sobriety. Out of all these options you can test the waters of each and see what type of program you can work, and work to the best of your ability.