

Introduction to Bipolar

Bipolar disorder affects approximately 2.6% of the US population. The illness usually appears at the age of 18 or older with most patients, although the illness can start in early childhood or as late as the 40's and 50's. Both men and women can develop bipolar illness, and it can be found in all ages, races, ethnic groups and social classes. Many bipolar people have close relatives with some kind of mental illness, (National Institute of Mental Health).

As I have mentioned, both men and women may experience the illness, however research indicates that three times as many women as men experience rapid cycling, which is a form of bipolar illness, the most severe of all Bipolar categories. Also, women with bipolar may have more depression episodes and more mixed episodes than men (Journal of Clinical Psychiatry.) Bipolar Illness is the sixth leading cause of disability in the US or maybe even in the world, the illness resulting in 9.2 years reduction in expected life span. However, because of my diet, exercise, spiritual beliefs, a loving and caring family, proper therapy and effective medication, I am hopefully in a different category. Will I live longer than the statistics say? I hope so.

My concern with this debilitating illness is how innocent children are affected with the mood disorder and how they cope with it. Personally, looking back, I recall my symptoms with bipolar at a very young age, and the sad part about it was I thought it was normal to be anxious, angry, manic, depressed, loud and unhappy. When one parent has bipolar disorder, the risk of each child is 15 to 30% higher for having the same illness. When both parents have the illness, the risk elevates to 50 to 75%, (National Institute of Mental Health.) This mood disorder is as common in adults as well as children. A child may be diagnosed at an early age and be helped, or he/she could live for many years without it being detected and never be helped, ultimately causing the child to commit suicide or be imprisoned. Ages affected are, toddlers from ages 3 to 5, but is very rare, children from 6 to 13 rare, teenagers 14 to 18 very common, young adults 19 to 40 very common, adults 41 to 60 also very common, seniors 60 and above is common. Some 20% of adolescents with major depression develop bipolar disorder within 5 years of the onset of depression (Birmaher, B, Childhood and Adolescent Depression .) As much as one third of the 3.4 million children and adolescents with depression in the US may actually be experiencing the early onset of bipolar disorder. Young people are more apt to be irritable and prone to be destructive as opposed to adults. When depressed, there may be many physical complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, tiredness, etc., (National Institute of Mental Health).

Success rates of 70 to 85% were once expected with Lithium for treatment of mania, but now only 40 to 50% is commonplace. My first med was Lithium, and its effect on me was unfavorable. I was extremely frightened from that time forward of any medication I was given. Lithium made me lethargic, physically tired and I had a loss of appetite. However, Lithium is still widely used as an effective medication in a wide spectrum of illness and diseases. There have been many advances in medication for people today, and I think that is why the success rate for people with mood disorders is so high.

Having access to resources is very important if one is to get help. Children in particular need help in the onset of symptoms. Does your child go through intense mood changes? Many children with the mood disorder are at the point where they are unable to function at school and at home. As I have explained earlier, mood disorders are a serious condition where a person's moods swing from being happy to being very sad. The swings that fluctuate between the two moods can cause a child to be hyper-productive one moment and show signs of depression the next. It usually develops later during the teen years or early adulthood and usually lasts a lifetime. For those people who don't believe that, they are

sadly mistaken. Children and adults with bipolar disorder can have other problems including substance abuse, ADHD and suicidal thoughts.

I have previously talked about Bipolar 1 and 2. The following traits are very noticeable with both categories. 1., diminished interest or pleasure in all things, 2., significant weight loss, 3., difficult or delay in falling asleep, 4. agitation, 5. pacing back and forth, 6. fatigue or loss of energy, 7. feeling worthless, 8. inability to think and concentrate, 9. recurring thoughts of death. On the other hand, manic episodes are sure to follow with irritability, inflated self-esteem that can be quite evident and decreased need to sleep. The main difference between Bipolar 1 and Bipolar 2 disorder is the severity and the number of episodes each category possesses. A person with Bipolar 1 has more recurring episodes of mania and depression than Bipolar 2.

I was told by my third 3rd therapist that I was Bipolar 2. I have not written of my experience, knowledge, or advice until now. One of my biggest fears was how my illness would affect my employment. When I graduated from college in 1973, I had no idea that I was bipolar. In fact, the illness was not fully understood. Today there is a stigma that still exists, and I believe it will continue to exist, forever. Thankfully I have received, and will continue to receive the treatment I need to remain healthy.

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