

WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Affecting about 6 million

Americans, bipolar disorder is a persistent illness with recurring episodes of mania and depression that can last from one day to months. Not everyone's symptoms are the same and the severity of mania and depression can vary. Because of its irregular patterns, bipolar disorder can be hard to diagnose.

COMMON SYMPTOMS:

SYMPTOMS OF MANIA

- An abnormally increased level of irritability
- Overconfidence or an extremely inflated self-esteem
- Increased talkativeness
- Decreased amount of sleep
- Engaging in risky behavior, such as spending sprees and impulsive sex
- Racing thoughts, jumping quickly from one idea to another

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Diminished capacity for pleasure or loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- A long period of feeling hopeless, helpless or low self-esteem
- Decreased amount of energy, feeling constantly tired
- Changes in eating, sleeping or other daily habits
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide attempts

Source: nami.org

MANDY'S STORY

DVR Counselor

AFTER SOME TRAUMATIC experiences, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Keep in mind that I had fought this health issue for a long time. I am one of “those” individuals who for a long time would skip meds, flush them down the toilet, just in general had a hard time. I have faced many “dark days” in which I have been suicidal and have required hospitalization as well as days of making irrational decisions, having tons of energy and feeling grandiose.

As I was struggling, a friend invited me to a NAMI support group. I finally felt as if I was not alone. From there, I was propelled into my road to recovery. I have “climbed the ladder” in NAMI to include leadership; which improved my ability to deal with personal challenges. Along my way, I have been hospitalized, taking time away from my education when it was not convenient. But I am still here, facing my challenges. I received a Masters degree in community counseling and was recently hired for a counseling position! This is fulfilling my dream of 10 years to get off of SSDI, join the “general” public and begin working again. That is what I call EMPOWERMENT!