

# What is Bipolar Disorder?

*"I don't know if you've heard this but it's not just an imaginary bed of roses being mentally ill."*

Tristan Miller is an actor and comedian who also happens to have Bipolar Disorder, a mental health disorder that causes huge mood swings. He finds talking about it even on stage helps him deal with it.

*"There's ups and downs and a lot of people think that like the ups are happy or they're, there's a lot of elation. And sometimes that's a component of it, but it can also be a severe anxiety or irritability or you're not getting enough sleep."*

And then there's the flip side of Bipolar Disorder, depression that can be crippling.

*"It's not just feeling sad, but you feel catatonic. Sometimes you can't get out of bed. You don't feel anything. There's a numbness to it."*

On average, Bipolar Disorder tends to appear in the mid 20's, though it can occur in the teens. And it seems to affect men and women equally. About 2-3% of Americans suffer from it. There is no one cause of bipolar disorder, but several factors might include: Someone in your family having bipolar disorder; Stress or trauma, such as death, divorce or illness; Or just the way your brain happens to work.

*"Classic bipolar disorder, it kind of hits you right between the eyes."*

To diagnose bipolar disorder, you have to rule out other mental health issues, such as Anxiety, Depression or Schizophrenia.

*"They would admit that they're not sleeping very well that they don't need much sleep that they've got all these irons in the fire and they're really busy. And that that this has happened before. And sometimes they've had these really horrible episodes of depression."*

The two main types of bipolar disorder are Bipolar I and Bipolar II. Bipolar I may or may not occur with current or past episodes of depression, but it is characterized by Mania: severe irritability or elevated mood and symptoms that last at least a week or send someone to the hospital.

*"Mania would be characterized by someone who sometimes would be psychotic. That is, might have delusions of grandeur or might say that they're the most brilliant, wonderful person in the world. But very often it might be someone who would talk too much and too fast, spend money too without good judgment, might be promiscuous sexually."*

With Bipolar II people will have milder forms of that mania called Hypomania, but it will alternate with intense depression. In periods of depression, they might have trouble sleeping or sleep too much. They might lose interest or no longer take pleasure in things they normally enjoy. They might feel worthless, guilty, or even consider suicide.

*"When I'm Hypomaniac, generally there's a lot, there's a lot less sleep. There's a lot of texting people I haven't spoken to in years. I'll call people at all hours. I'm incredibly anxious at my place of work."*

# What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar Disorder can't be cured but it can be managed. Your psychiatrist will likely prescribe medications to help even out your mood swings, for example. These medications might include Mood Stabilizers, Anticonvulsants, Antipsychotics, and Antidepressants.

Talk Therapy can also help, including family therapy to help reduce the stress the symptoms can create for family members. One type of talk therapy is called CBT, or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

*"By changing the way, you think and the way you behave, you change the mood."*

*"So if you're sad or depressed, we're going to be kind of taking a look at what sorts of thoughts you're having that have generated sadness, and what are you doing behaviorally that kind of reinforces that and kind of keeps this sad mood in place. So, the target of Cognitive Therapy isn't actually the emotion. The target is kind of the thinking and the behavior."*

Lifestyle changes can also help manage Bipolar symptoms. Creating a daily routine, exercise, meditation and healthy eating, as well as limits on caffeine, nicotine or alcohol can all play a part in evening out your mood.

For Tristan, being able to recognize his Bipolar Disorder symptoms and then get professional help have made all the difference.

*"You can still have a career; you can still have a life. And it shows people that it's not debilitating, or it can be, it, it can be treated."*

*"Thank you. That has been my time. I'm Tristan Miller."*

Talk to your health care provider. Bipolar disorder cannot be cured, but you can learn to manage it and live a successful life.