Men Can Have Bipolar Disorder, Too

by BETHANY HEINESH

Understanding Symptoms of Bipolar in Men

For some reason, we hear a lot about women having bipolar disorder, but not so much about men. A lot of the information, articles and commercials we see are targeted at women. Plus, the characters we see on television and in movies with bipolar are mostly women. Why is this? Why are bipolar symptoms in men not broadcast? After all, bipolar disorder can affect anyone regardless of their gender.

Bipolar Disorder Facts

You might be surprised to learn that, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, of the 46 million people worldwide who are diagnosed with bipolar disorder, half of them are men. The illness does not discriminate when it comes to gender. However, we generally think of this as a woman's illness. This is not true.

Men suffer from bipolar disorder just as frequently as women do. It causes them just as much pain and suffering. They experience just as many painful consequences because of this illness. The sad truth is, men are more likely to suffer in silence because stigma tells them it is not okay for them to have a mental illness.

Let's talk about men and bipolar disorder. You need as many resources, support and information as you can get your hands on so you can learn to manage your illness and live a meaningful life in spite of your diagnosis.

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

First, the basics: what is bipolar disorder? It does not matter who you are, because this illness affects the brain in the same way. In simple terms, bipolar causes an imbalance of powerful chemicals in the brain that regulate energy and emotion.

On one end of the spectrum, you have mania. This happens when the brain is surged with powerful feel-good chemicals, like serotonin and dopamine. On the other end of the spectrum is depression, when the brain is depleted of these chemicals. When the brain's chemicals are not regulated properly and your brain does not function properly, it can wreak havoc on your entire life and cause all sorts of problems.

Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder in Men

Symptoms of bipolar in men can include the following:

- Hypomania or mania (an extreme boost of energy)
- Mild to extreme depression (low energy)
- Insomnia (little or no need for sleep)
- Hypersomnia (sleeping too much)
- Irritability

- Rage for no reason
- Difficulty in relationships
- Struggles with employment
- Lack of focus and concentration
- Bizarre thoughts
- A general inability to function

Remember, symptoms vary from person to person. It is difficult to make a list of bipolar symptoms for men just as it is for women because everyone experiences this illness in their own unique way. Bipolar does not necessarily affect men differently than women. It affects the individual with individual symptomology that creates a unique experience for the person who has the bipolar diagnosis.

Bipolar Isn't a Sign of Weakness, It's a Sign of Illness

Men struggle tremendously with coming to terms with a bipolar diagnosis because they associate it with weakness. This is true for women also, but it seems to be much more difficult for men who have bipolar.

Men have been unfairly saddled with the burden of hero, knight in shining armor, head of the household and so many other roles that require them to save the day. This leaves almost no allowance for them to be sick or in need of help from others.

We must shout it from the rooftops that bipolar is not a weakness. It is an illness. Simple as that. To all the men out there, give yourself permission to be sick. It's okay to need help.

No one labels men with diabetes or asthma as weak. Why should we label a man this when he has a mental illness? When treated, men with bipolar disorder can go on to lead successful, productive, meaningful lives. They can thrive in leadership roles, both at home and in the workplace.

In fact, in my esteemed opinion, men with bipolar are superheroes; they manage this illness and handle business. It requires incredible strength, courage and tenacity. So, if you are a man with bipolar, I applaud you. Take ownership of your illness, get help and rise above the stigma. You are not weak. You are sick, and with the right medication and treatment, you can get better.

Treatment of Bipolar Disorder

The first step toward getting help with bipolar disorder is getting honest with yourself. As a man this can be difficult. You have been taught to "suck it up" and "walk it off." You have been taught to solve your own problems and that reaching out and asking for help is a sissy move. This is all terrible advice when it comes to your health. Bipolar disorder will never go away on its own. It is a progressive illness that will only get worse with time, and chances are if you are reading this article, things are already pretty bad by now.

You can take self-assessment quizzes online from the privacy of your own home if you think you have bipolar. These are great. They will give you some insight about the likelihood of you having the disorder, but you must get an official diagnosis from your doctor.

If your doctor believes you have bipolar, they will put you on bipolar medications and recommend that you see a therapist who specializes in mental health disorders so you can have support as you navigate your diagnosis. The good news is that bipolar treatment is not just medication, doctors and therapy. It's mountain biking and meditating and exploring new activities that promote wellness. You get to figure these things out on your own.

Get Out There and Start Enjoying Your Life

Bipolar disorder is a bummer, but only when you let the illness run your life. When you take your health by the reigns and start steering your own destiny in the direction you want it to go, things take a complete 180. There is no shame in having bipolar disorder.

Get honest with yourself. Get honest with your doctor. Get honest with the people in your life. You will be amazed at how supportive your loved ones can be. I’m a gambling woman and I would bet good money that no one is going to think you are weak.