Understanding the Differences Between Depression and Bipolar

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Is It Depression or Bipolar?

Bipolar disorder, formerly known as manic depression, is a mental illness that affects mood, similar to clinical depression. The identifying difference in a person with bipolar disorder is that they experience episodes of mania, which doesn't happen in those suffering from clinical or situational depression.

Opposite to episodes of mania, episodes of depression can also occur. An episode of depression in someone with bipolar disorder will present itself in the same way as other forms of depression as far as the symptoms and their effects. Not sure if depression or bipolar disorder is causing your symptoms? Read on to learn more.

What Are the Symptoms of Bipolar?

- **Mania:** Bipolar disorder is characterized by episodes of mania and depression. During an episode of mania there are feelings of over confidence, increased joy or happy, and even euphoria. Occasionally during a manic episode the person may lose sight of what is real.
- **Lost Focus:** During manic episode, those with bipolar disorder may plan unrealistic goals or start large projects. It's common though for these projects to be abandoned halfway through completion once the episode passes. This could potentially cause issues with productivity in the workplace as they can have difficulty concentrating.
- **Depression:** When an episode of mania passes, the person may experience a pause in symptoms for a while before potentially slipping into an episode of depression. When in this state they will act and react in the same way as someone with clinical or situational depression. This can make bipolar disorder difficult to treat as antidepressants could send them into an episode of mania. It's important for them to be in close communication with their doctor and discuss all of the symptoms so that they may provide treatment accordingly.
- **Agitation:** Irritability and agitation are common in those who suffer from mood disorders, especially when experiencing feelings of frustration. Occasionally those with bipolar disorder may experience an episode of "mixed mania" which is a combination of both mania and depression at the same time causing increased irritability and confusion.
- **Others:** Many symptoms of bipolar disorder are similar to those of other forms of depression such as trouble focusing and lack of productivity, difficulty sleeping, and even substance abuse. Alcohol abuse is fairly common among those suffering from bipolar disorder as it can help to bring them down during an episode of mania as well as increase their mood during an episode of depression.

Who Can It Affect?

Depression and bipolar disorder can affect anyone. There are many factors that can affect cause and severity such as family history, life experiences, environment, and physical health. For those diagnosed, there are many treatment options available.

Treatment Options

Once properly diagnosed, bipolar disorder must be treated a little differently than depression, as antidepressants can trigger a manic episode. There are still many treatment options available though, such as:

- **Atypical Antipsychotics:** These are a fairly new form of medication that may provide more relief but could also come with increased side effects. It's important for someone with bipolar disorder to work closely with their doctor to find the right fit.
- **Psychotherapy:** Working with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and a psychiatrist can increase coping skills and help with prevention. By learning to change thought patters and beliefs, a person with bipolar disorder can improve the stability of their mood. They may also learn to recognize patterns and develop skills to help decrease the chance of relapse.
- **Lifestyle Changes:** While small or significant changes in lifestyle likely won't be able to reverse the symptoms and effects of bipolar disorder, it may increase an overall feeling of wellness in those affected by bipolar disorder. Things such as a healthy diet, routine sleep patterns, regular exercise, and meditation may aid in treatment.

Conclusion

While those with bipolar disorder have episodes of depression, it can't always be treated the same way as other forms of depression due to the episodes of mania. There are support groups and treatment options available to ensure effective therapy and positive change.