

Facts About Bipolar Disorder and Suicide

Almost two million Americans currently suffer from bipolar disorder. Also known as manic-depressive illness, bipolar disorder is a mood disorder in which episodes of depression alternate or mix with periods of mania.

Although many effective treatments are available, bipolar disorder is often not properly recognized and treated as a disorder, resulting in years of needless suffering, and often in death by suicide.

- Approximately twenty percent of all patients with bipolar disorder have their first episode during adolescence. Peak age of onset is between fifteen and nineteen years.
- Most people suffering from bipolar disorder who attempt suicide do so very soon after the onset of the disorder.
- Patients suffering from depression and bipolar disorder are far more likely to take their own lives than individuals in any other psychiatric or medical risk group. Without effective treatment, bipolar disorder leads to suicide in nearly 20 percent of cases.
- The mortality rate for untreated bipolar patients is higher than it is for most types of heart disease and many types of cancer.
- Among all those who die by suicide, more than two thirds suffered from a depressive illness or bipolar disorder.
- Although more men than women *complete* suicide in the general population (4:1), the gender rates for completed suicide in those suffering from bipolar disorder are equal.
- Studies of bipolar populations indicate that 25-50% of bipolar people attempt suicide at least once.
- Studies indicate that most bipolar patients who die by suicide try and communicate their suicidal ideas to others, most frequently through a direct and specific statement of suicidal intent.
- There is strong scientific evidence linking bipolar disorder, artistic creativity, and suicide. More research is needed to determine which patients are most vulnerable to suicide and which treatments effectively deal with the disorder without hindering a person's artistic performance and creativity.
- Treatments for people with depressive disorder are successful in alleviating symptoms over 80% of the time.

The most reliable method of preventing suicide in patients with bipolar disorder is early and accurate diagnosis, followed by aggressive treatment of the underlying disorder.