

Bipolar disorder (also known as manic depressive illness) is a severe mental disorder, primarily characterised by extreme mood swings and episodes of depression and hypomania/mania. It has a highly recurrent course and a strong hereditary basis (Goodwin and Jamison, 2007). Despite effective pharmacological (Goodwin 2002; Keck and McElroy 2002) and more recently psychosocial treatments (Lam, Watkins et al. 2003; Miklowitz, George et al. 2003; Frank, Kupfer et al. 2005), once expressed the illness is characterised by a chronic course that will involve numerous bipolar episodes and equally persistent disabling sub-syndromal symptomatology (Judd et al., 2005). Depending on the diagnostic threshold used, severe presentations of it make it a relatively rare condition with approximately 1% prevalence rate. Nevertheless, milder forms of the disorder have been estimated to be highly prevalent (6.4%, Judd and Akiskal, 2003).

### *key references*

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