

Depression and Bipolar Disorder

By Christine Cooper, M.S., and Robyn Coombs, Psy.D.

Fact vs. Fiction

What is the real deal about depression and bipolar disorder? Are these medical disorders or just an overreaction to normal emotions? With all of the pharmaceutical ads out there, it can be confusing if you don't have the facts.

The Facts About Depression

- About 21 million people over the age of 18 suffer from depression.
- There are different types of depression—including major depressive disorder and dysthymia, a chronic mild depression. Major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the United States.
- Major depressive disorder affects about 9.9 million American adults, or about 5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.
- Nearly twice as many women (6.7 million) as men (3.2 million) suffer from major depressive disorder each year. Women attempt suicide more frequently, but four times as many men as women die from suicide.
- More than 90 percent of the 29,350 people who killed themselves in 2000 were believed to have had a diagnosable mental disorder, commonly depression or a substance abuse disorder.
- There are 1,100 suicides on college campuses each year.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Why are mental health concerns common in college?

Besides the fact that mental illness is fairly common at every point in life, the years of young adulthood are a common age of onset for many disorders including bipolar disorder. In addition, stress can increase one's vulnerability for mental health problems.

The stresses of college life include:

- Academic demands
- Living on your own for the first time
- Changes in family relations
- The cost of college
- Changes in your social life
- Exposure to unhealthy behaviors including drugs and alcohol
- Awareness of your sexual identity and orientation
- Preparing for life after graduation

What Depression Is

Depression is a clinical disorder that has both biological and psychosocial causes. Depression is highly treatable with psychotherapy, medication or a combination of both. Depression is common, affecting as many as 15% of men and 25% of women in their lifetime.

"People think 'depression—oh, big deal.' But I don't know anyone who's been through a major depression who hasn't at least contemplated suicide. You feel copeless and hopeless and in a special kind of pain."

—Wallace, co-editor of CBS' "60 Minutes," describing his first bout with depression in 1984.

What Depression Is Not

Depression is not having a bad day or two. Depression is not the result of a lack of character or personal weakness. Depression is not something which one can easily choose to "snap out of." Depression is not something that should be treated lightly or ignored.

Signs of Depression

- Depressed mood the majority of time
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Weight loss or gain
- Loss of appetite
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of motivation
- Feelings of guilt

The Facts About Bipolar Disorder

- Bipolar disorder affects approximately 5.7 million American adults, or about 2.6 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.
- The median age of onset for bipolar disorders is 25 years.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

"In the majority of circumstances, bipolar disorder, like diabetes, can be managed and controlled. However, if left untreated, it can result in negative outcomes and even premature death. Unless we educate our students and work to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help on America's campuses, young people will suffer needlessly."

—Ken Duckworth, M.D., assistant professor at Harvard Medical School

"During a manic episode, I stayed awake for 5 days straight, but had a lot of energy. I spent my tuition on a major shopping spree and long distance phone calls. I also had sex with several guys that I hardly knew. At the time, I felt so great that I couldn't see that there were serious problems with what I was doing."

—Teresa, College Student

What Bipolar Disorder Is

Bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression) may be influenced by psychosocial factors but also involves biochemical changes. Bipolar disorder is characterized by periods of depressed mood as well as periods of elevated or agitated mood which is often accompanied by impulsivity. Bipolar disorder is best treated by a combination of medication and therapy. Medication is generally a necessary aspect of treatment for bipolar disorder.

What Bipolar Disorder Is Not

Bipolar disorder is not just experiencing a normal fluctuation of moods. Bipolar disorder does not mean being two-sided and being nice one minute and mean the next. Bipolar disorder involves serious symptomatology with corresponding mood states which can be extreme and hard for the individual to handle without treatment.

Signs of Bipolar Disorder

- Periods of depression
as well as periods with:
- Decreased need for sleep
- Impulsive decisions such as shopping sprees or sexual indiscretions
- Feelings of intense happiness
- Feelings of powerfulness and grandiosity
- Increased talking and rapid speech
- Feeling "on top of the world"
- Seemingly boundless energy
- Beginning many tasks
- Feelings of agitation or irritability

What to do

If you experience some of these symptoms, or have a friend who may have depression or bipolar disorder, you should reach out for help. CAPS provides free counseling to students. If your friend is resistant to therapy, you can also suggest they speak to a religious leader or resident assistant. If the situation is serious, do not hesitate to reach out to mental health or medical emergency services.

"Getting treatment definitely changed my life for the better and helped me avoid flunking a semester."

—John, College Student

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

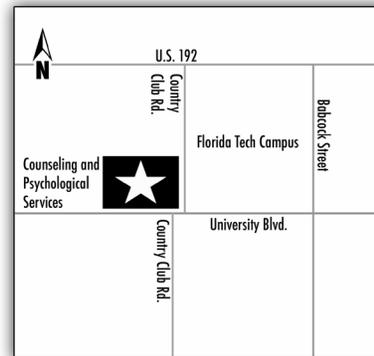
CAPS is a counseling facility operated by Florida Institute of Technology's School of Psychology. Its goals are to promote the best possible academic, vocational and emotional health. Our services are available to students and their immediate families. Counseling services are available on campus at CAPS (674-8050), off campus at the Women's Center (727-2200) or through your private health care provider.

Center Hours

Monday–Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. • Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location

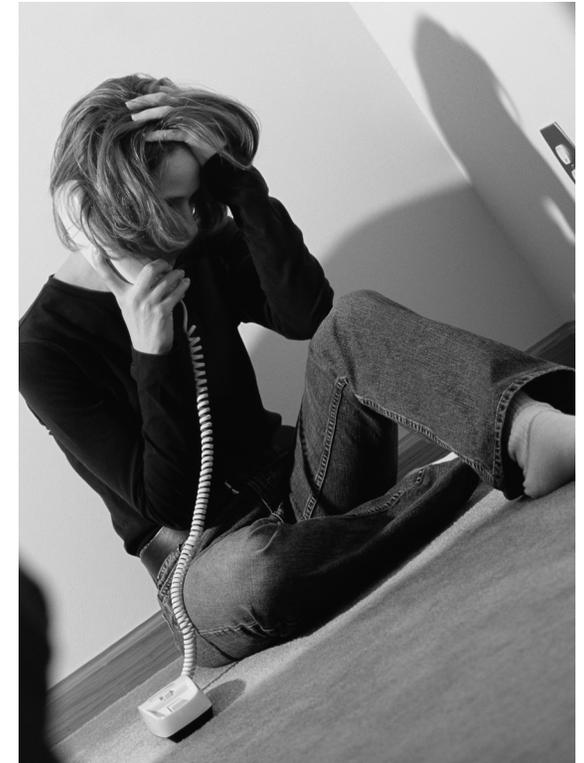
Intersection of Country Club Road and University Boulevard, west of Babcock Street



For additional counseling, academic success resources and helpful articles, visit www.fit.edu/caps or call 674-8050.

PY-445-707

Depression and Bipolar Disorder



Florida Institute of Technology
Counseling and Psychological Services