



# Health Bulletin



## Understanding Bipolar Disorder

(NAPSA)—A number of advancements have helped improve treatments for bipolar disorder. Yet misconceptions still surround the disease, according to two recent surveys.

The surveys, conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), found that understanding about bipolar disorder remains low. The two surveys investigated opinions about bipolar disorder held by the general public and opinions held by people with the disorder.

The public knowledge survey found that even though eight out of 10 U.S. adults (82 percent) claim to know what bipolar disorder is, less than two-thirds (64 percent) can correctly define bipolar disorder from a list of descriptions of several mental illnesses.

In a finding that highlights the stigma still surrounding the illness, less than half (40 percent) of the population feel that people with bipolar disorder have any difficulty discussing their condition with others, even though an overwhelming number of persons with bipolar disorder (79 percent) fear repercussions if they do.

“The public’s understanding of bipolar disorder remains unacceptably low, yet with proper diagnosis and treatment, people with bipolar disorder can reclaim their lives and avoid many of the unintended consequences of this disease,” said Dr. Ken Duckworth, NAMI medical director and assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. “Our goal is reinforcing the importance



### **Recent surveys have found gaps in people’s understanding of bipolar disorder.**

of people with bipolar disorder seeking a professional diagnosis and treatment plan and sticking to that regimen.”

Other key findings include:

- A majority of U.S. adults fail to recognize most of the classic symptoms of bipolar disorder. Sixty-four percent of public survey respondents recognized rapid, unpredictable emotional changes as a symptom of bipolar disorder; however, less than half of respondents recognized other bipolar disorder symptoms. Twenty-five percent of the general adult public admitted they were not sure of the symptoms of bipolar disorder.

- Approximately one in five (17 percent) respondents to the public survey believed that people with bipolar disorder can control their illness without medication if they really want to do so.

- Close to two-thirds (62 percent) feel people with bipolar disorder have difficulty establishing or maintaining relationships, and many feel people with bipolar disorder have difficulty with other life skills, such as consistently attending work or school (52 percent), managing their time (55 percent), focusing (54 percent) and getting or maintaining a job (50 percent).

### **About Bipolar Disorder**

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is a serious brain disorder. Usually diagnosed in late adolescence, it causes extreme shifts in mood, energy or functioning that can range from episodes of mania or “highs” to episodes of depression or “lows.” These mood swings can be mild or severe and may last hours, days or months.

Bipolar disorder is a chronic condition and generally requires life-long treatment. With accurate diagnosis and treatment, people with bipolar disorder can lead full and productive lives. A strategy that combines medication and psychosocial treatment is optimal for managing the disorder over time. If left untreated, however, the disorder can produce catastrophic results.

Approximately 25-50 percent of people with bipolar disorder attempt suicide at least once; this is one of the highest rates for any psychiatric disorder. The World Health Organization estimates that bipolar disorder is the sixth leading cause of disability in the world, with more than 5.7 million people affected worldwide.

To learn more about bipolar disorder, visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).