Cyclothymia

Cyclothymia or cyclothymic disorder is a mental illness which causes people to experience mood swings which, in turn, affect their ability to carry out everyday tasks. Cyclothymia is often thought of as a mild form of bipolar disorder. The changes in mood that people experience are beyond what most people regard as the normal ups and downs of everyday life. The person’s mood may change from feeling depressed to feeling very happy and energetic. However, these changes in mood are not extreme enough, nor do they last long enough, to qualify for a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Cyclothymia is diagnosed over the course of two years and is characterised by frequent short periods of hypomania and depressive symptoms separated by periods of stability. It is important to remember that although cyclothymia is described as being a milder form of bipolar disorder, it is a condition which can cause distress and anxiety and have a great impact on someone’s quality of life. Although it is a serious illness, cyclothymia can be managed and people with this condition can lead full and productive lives.

What causes cyclothymia?
The exact causes of cyclothymia are not fully known but it seems that there are changes in the chemicals in the brain when people experience an episode of mania or depression. People are more at risk of developing cyclothymia if other family members have a diagnosis. Stressful experiences, physical illnesses and traumatic events are thought to trigger the condition in some people.

Who is affected by cyclothymia?
About 1 in 100 people has a form of bipolar disorder – which includes people who have cyclothymia. It often develops in a person’s late teenage years or early adult years. At least half of all cases start before a person reaches 25 years. Some people have their first symptoms during
What are the signs or symptoms of cyclothymia?

Signs of mania or a manic episode

- a period of ‘feeling high’ or being in an overly happy or outgoing mood,
- extremely irritable mood, agitation, feeling ‘jumpy’ or ‘wired’
- talking very fast, jumping from one idea to another, having racing thoughts
- being easily distracted
- increasing goal-directed activities, such as taking on new projects
- being restless and sleeping very little
- having an unrealistic belief in one's abilities
- behaving impulsively and taking part in a lot of pleasurable, high-risk behaviours, such as spending sprees, impulsive sex, and impulsive business investments.

Signs of depression or depressive mood

- a period of feeling worried or empty
- loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- feeling tired and lacking in energy
- having problems concentrating, remembering, and making decisions
- being restless or irritable
- changing eating, sleeping, or other habits
- thinking of death or suicide, or attempting suicide.

What should I do if I think I have cyclothymia?

In the first instance you could go and see your GP. You may want to tell him or her how you have been feeling and what impact this is having on your life – and those around you. Your GP may refer you to a psychiatrist for assessment. There is more information about the help that may be offered to you in the help and support section of the website.

What can help with cyclothymia?

There are many things that can help you treat and manage your cyclothymia. These include:
• getting help as early as possible. Research shows that people make a better recovery from cyclothymia if they receive help at the earlier stages of the condition.

• medicines (also known as medication or prescribed drugs) can help you prevent and treat the condition. Some medicines known as ‘anti-psychotics’ can help people reduce a manic episode. Anti-depressants can help people during depressive episodes and mood stabilisers can help reduce both manic and depressive episodes and can also be taken all the time to prevent the symptoms returning. There is more information about medicines that can help with bipolar disorders which includes cyclothymia on the websites of the national mental health charities, Mind and Rethink and MDF - The Bipolar Organisation

• psychological therapies such as psychotherapy, counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy and relationship or family therapy. There is more information about this type of help in the psychological therapies section of this website.

• getting support and sharing experiences with other people living with cyclothymia. You can read more about other people's experiences of cyclothymia on this website.'Cyclothymia - how it makes me feel' gives an insight into someone else's experience of this condition.You can also read 'A drummer's thoughts', 'An Amazing Creation' and a lyrical piece - 'Unnamed',

• learning as much as possible about the condition and how it affects you. This could include how to recognize that you might need help. It can be useful to do this together with family members and others who are involved in supporting you. There are books and websites which provide information and support. The Cyclothymia Workbook is a workbook which provides information about cyclothymia and can help you learn how to manage your condition. MDF - The Bipolar Organisation is a good source of information and support for people with all forms of bipolar disorder.

• looking after yourself and trying to lead a healthy lifestyle by eating well, keeping active and getting enough sleep.

• finding ways to reduce the amount of stress in your life and trying to avoid the things which might trigger an episode

• making changes to your life to increase your sense of mental wellbeing