What Does It Mean to Have Bipolar II?

by JANE BRASIL

What Does It Mean to Be Bipolar II?

Being diagnosed with bipolar II disorder has been a long and frustrating journey for me. I had my first episode with major clinical depression when I was 39 years old. For me, it was the worse experience in my life.

It was frightful and horrifying. It was to be the first time I had to be hospitalized for depression and hopefully I thought it would be the last.

There were times in my life that I had felt unusually sad, but this was different from any sadness I had ever experienced before. I was prescribed several different types of antidepressants. All of them had side effects, and some worked better than others.

Unfortunately, it took two more major clinical depressions and subsequent hospitalizations before a psychologist diagnosed me with bipolar II. I thought that I suffered from depression. End of story.

I had no concept of what bipolar is and isn't. The fact that there was bipolar I and bipolar II was even more confusing. He was the first doctor to ask me if I had ever experienced elevated high moods. Now that rang a bell.

Then I remembered something a dear friend told me. She said that for as long as she knew me, I was either very happy or very sad. She was so right. Why hadn't I noticed that before?

Then again, I thought everybody felt either very happy or very sad. What else was there?

There Was a Lot to Learn About Bipolar II

I had a lot of learning to do – I had to educate myself on what bipolar II was and what it means. I learned that bipolar II mood disorder has elevated mood swings that are highly insightful and creative. It means that we are at our very best. It is on a level that we want to stay forever.

The low moods of bipolar II are incapacitating. Living through this depressive stage is frightening. The bad feelings just do not stop. The emptiness is indescribable. No one can fully understand it unless they have experienced it.

For me, it means that I have to stay acutely aware of how I am feeling at any given moment. It means that I keep track of my moods. I need to stay on guard and recognize signs that alert me that my current mood is changing and not in a good way.

No matter how much I try to prepare myself for the down times, they always catch me by surprise. Even though I know that these times will not last, the mere experience of having this mood change brings back all the old feelings of depression.

These low moods are not nearly as intense as a full-blown clinical depressive episode, and that is only because I am currently on two medications. One is for depression, and the other is meant to be a mood stabilizer. This combination of medicines keeps me from experiencing a full-blown clinical depressive event.

Unfortunately, I still have depressive episodes at least every three to four months

The Low Periods of Bipolar II

My depressive episodes typically last ten days to two weeks. Although I am not suicidal during these times and there is no need to be admitted to a hospital, I simply cannot function the way I usually do.

I become extremely fatigued as though I could sleep for days, I lack any motivation, and I isolate myself and do not want to talk to friends or family. Much of that time I won't even answer the phone.

I feel alone and frightened. Nothing interests me. I have no ambition, and I feel immensely bored, I can't wait for the day to end, and I pretty much keep to myself. Unfortunately, I look at every mistake I have ever made and blame myself for everything bad that happened to me.

When I am having these low periods, it seems as though I will never feel normal again. I have to dig deep down into my almost unconscious mind to tell myself that this is just one of those times and it will not last forever. It will pass. I have to wait it out. It is easier said than done.

I don't confide in my friends or family when I am going through one of these low moods. My concern is that they might think that every low feeling I have is a depressive episode.

To be honest, I am a master of disguise. People who suffer from depression have the unique ability to hide their depression. We can act normal to almost everyone we encounter. I can still remember times that I went to work when I was depressed, and I just kept going until I couldn't do it anymore.

I would hold on as long as I could. It was either denial or the determination that I would fight it to the end. Unfortunately, depression always won no matter how hard I tried. That was then.

I Accept Who I Am

This is now. I now know that these low depressive periods will end, I talk to myself every day when I am in this horrible place, and I remind myself again and again that this too shall pass again. That it will soon be over, and I have to hold on and do whatever I can do to make it easier on myself.

I accept that I am feeling lazy because I am going through a low episode, not because I am a lazy person. I allow myself to simply be lazy and do nothing if I don't feel like it. The world is not going to come to an end if I don't accomplish much right now. If I were at home sick with the flu, I certainly would not be upset with myself if I was not feeling well and didn't do much.

I allow myself the time to recover and accept the fact that while I am recovering, I will not need to do anything except relax my body and mind and continue to love myself always whether I am doing something or not doing anything.