I have been told I have bipolar disorder. What do I do now?

It is natural to feel some concern when first diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mental disorders can be scary. But help is available at BHI! Our job is to help you manage your illness so you can lead a productive and satisfying life

This flyer will help you learn about the kinds of help that you can get at BHI. BHI employed experts in the field to research the latest and most effective strategies used in managing this disorder The recommendations in this flyer are a result of their research. After reading it, you will know how your doctors and therapists can help you feel better. You will also learn some of the things that you can do to help yourself.

What will happen when I get help at BHI?

You may already have had a meeting with a clinician who asked you questions about what you are feeling and experiencing. Based on your answers, the interviewer may suspect that you have bipolar disorder..

Next, it is important to see a medical doctor who treats people who have bipolar disorder. This doctor is a psychiatrist who may decide to prescribe medicines to help you feel better. Why is it critical to see a doctor? Getting on the right medication is considered the primary treatment for this disorder. Studies have demonstrated significant decreases in return of serious symptoms of bipolar disorder when medications are taken regularly. Your doctor will probably ask more questions to confirm the diagnosis. Then your doctor will spend some time deciding which medication is best for you based on your age, medications you've taken in the past and present, and your lifestyle.

What happens when I see a therapist?

In the beginning, it is helpful for your therapist to get to know you well and to learn about your symptoms. He or she will talk with you and may have you answer questions that will help understand you better. If you say it is OK, your family and other concerned friends may also talk with the therapist.

These first meetings with your therapist are called the "In Depth Assessment" because they help your therapist learn about your personal experience of this disorder and what treatments you might find most helpful. By looking together at the kinds of stress you have experienced or may be experiencing in life, whether in your daily lifestyle, or perhaps with your family and other relationships, your therapist can help you choose from a variety of treatment options that will best fit your needs.

Building a treatment plan is a bit like choosing food from a menu. There are many items on the menu but you do not order them all at once. Sometimes you will order more than one thing from the menu. Following is a menu of some of the types of treatment that have been shown to be effective in improving the quality of life and are available through BHI:

Become an Expert on Bipolar Disorder and Your Medications:

Becoming an expert on bipolar disorder and any medications you may be taking has been proven to help reduce the likelihood of severe mood swings. BHI is committed to helping you become such an expert by providing you and your family and concerned friends with 1) educational materials, 2) classes, 3) and Individualized therapy with your treatment team.

Strengthen Your Interpersonal Relationships

Having bipolar disorder often causes an increase in the normal stress of getting along with other people. Identifying and managing these challenges is an important skill that will help you better understand how bipolar disorder may be affecting or changing your relationships. Stressful family interactions can trigger symptoms of bipolar disorder. Improving relationships will help you manage your illness.

Stabilize Your Daily Rhythms:

Evidence suggests that for people with Bipolar disorder, stress can disrupt the biological rhythms. In other words, bipolar disorder can throw off your natural rhythms of sleep and daily plans and this can lead to greater mood swings. Your therapist will help you evaluate your daily rhythms to help you stay on track for a smoother pattern of sleep and activity.

Deal Effectively with Stress and Change:

Everyone experiences stress and change.. Life events resulting in disruptions in social routines are a particularly important predictor for the onset of episodes of mania.

Learn Thinking Skills to Cope with Depressive Thoughts

Cognitive means *thinking* Your thinking is affected by bipolar disorder Cognitive therapy has been shown to reduce occurrence of depressive symptoms... For example, when you are depressed you may be thinking hopeless thoughts. This therapy teaches you how to look at your thoughts in order to challenge them when they are not helping you feel better.

Learn New Family-Building Skills

Your family or those you live with need to learn about the disorder in order to cope with its effects on interpersonal interactions. In order to reestablish or strengthen family relationships BHI recommends training in skills designed to decrease family stressors. These include communication enhancement training and problem solving techniques training

Be vigilant for the return of symptoms:

Because Bipolar disorder is a lifelong illness, even when you are not experiencing problems, there are skills you'll need in order to stay healthy. Relapse means an increase in symptoms. These interventions can help you and your friends to know what to do if your symptoms begin to return.

Take Advantage of the Power of Peer and Community Support

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) describes this important adjunct to treatment well:

"....Peer-run support groups offer comfort and direction in a confidential and supportive setting, and where you can make a difference in the lives of others. Services offered differ by group, depending upon the needs of its members. Most groups are volunteer run and provide self-help through facilitated meetings. They are not group therapy, however many groups have a professional advisor – a psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse or social worker from the community.

In addition to participating in the group sessions, you will meet people from your community who can relate to your experiences and you may learn valuable information about mental health professionals and services in your area as well as tips and techniques others use to manage their illness. Peer-run support groups can:

- *Give you the opportunity to reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have "been there."*
- *Motivate you to follow your treatment plan.*
- *Help you understand that a mood disorder does not define who you are.*
- *Help you rediscover strengths and humor you may have thought you had lost.*
- *Provide a forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery"*

From:
http://www.ndmda.org/supportgroups.html.

Behavioral HEALTHCARE

BEST TREATMENT OPTIONS for Bipolar Disorders