

THE CYCLOTHYMIA WORKBOOK

Learn How to Manage Your Mood Swings & Lead a Balanced Life

By Prentiss Price, Ph.D.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THAT WORKAHOLIC YOU KNOW MAY ACTUALLY HAVE AN UNDIAGNOSED MENTAL DISORDER

Do you know a workaholic? How about that friend that has periodic bouts of moodiness? If so you may want to pay closer attention, because these seemingly harmless personality quirks can be a symptom of a more serious condition known as *cyclothymia*, a milder but still debilitating form of bipolar disorder that affects between 1–3 million Americans.

Cyclothymia can be difficult to recognize, since its symptoms can appear to be merely personality traits. Friends may consider someone unpredictable and occasionally hard to get along with, or family may shake their heads over their succession of failed romantic relationships, without realizing that these are signs of a larger problem.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prentiss Price, Ph.D., is a counseling psychologist at the Counseling and Career Development Center of Georgia Southern University. She has developed the website www.allaboutdepression.com as a clearinghouse of information about depression and depressive disorders. She is also a content developer for workplaceblues.com and reconnectingu.com, a resource for mentally ill individuals and their families. Ms. Price resides in Statesboro, GA

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SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please explain the condition *cyclothymia* or *cyclothymic disorder*.
2. What are some of the symptoms of the condition?
3. Will someone with cyclothymia eventually develop full-blown bipolar disorder?
4. You mention in the book that people with cyclothymia may repeatedly engage in brief, intense relationships — could you explain why?
5. What type of treatment plan for cyclothymia do you outline in your book?
6. If someone listening to this interview right now thinks that they may have the condition, what do you recommend they do?
7. Do you have any advice for someone whose spouse, parent, or sibling has cyclothymia?

EXCERPT FROM THE CYCLOTHYMIA WORKBOOK

Chapter One

WHAT IS CYCLOTHYMIC DISORDER?

Almost everyone has heard of depression or clinical depression as a serious mental health condition. Many people have also heard of bipolar disorder, otherwise known as manic depression. However, few people have ever heard of cyclothymic disorder or cyclothymia. In fact, the majority of those who are familiar with this condition either work in the mental health field or struggle with the condition themselves. If you have been diagnosed with cyclothymia, or you are wondering whether you might have it, you may have discovered that there is little information readily available about this illness.

CYCLOTHYMIC MOOD SWINGS

Cyclothymia is characterized by mood swings between the lows of depression and the highs of hypomania, or feeling euphoric, energized, and driven. The mood swings are not extreme enough, nor do they last long enough, to qualify for a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. If you have cyclothymia, you may already know that a mood of one extreme or the other can last as long as several hours, days, or even weeks. Commonly, though, cycling from one mood to the next happens rather suddenly and irregularly, with periods of “normal” or even mood being rare. Those who know the person with cyclothymia often notice the behavior and mood changes, and they may say things like, “Joe is just going through one of his blue periods again” or “Sarah has been in her workaholic mode for a while now” or “Steve has been more irritable than usual lately.”

Cyclothymia tends to be a chronic condition, with symptoms of depression and hypomania lasting an entire lifetime. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) estimates that cyclothymia affects 0.4 to 1 per-cent of the population, which translates to between 1.2 million and nearly 3 million Americans. This condition often begins early in life, usually in adolescence or early adulthood, and it affects men and women almost equally. As with other mood disorders, there appears to be some hereditary influence. It is common for those with cyclothymia to have first-degree relatives (parents, children, or siblings) who have struggled with cyclothymia, major depressive disorder, or bipolar disorder.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION AND HYPOMANIA *

Symptoms of Depression

- Down, sad, or depressed mood; tearfulness
- Low energy or motivation; accomplishing tasks is an effort
- Sleeping too much or too little; difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Problems with concentrating, thinking, or making decisions
- Changes in appetite; marked weight loss or gain
- Feeling slowed down or agitated
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable

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Symptoms of Hypomania

- Elevated, overly gregarious, or irritable mood
- Increased self-esteem, grandiosity
- Reduced need for sleep, feeling rested with only a few hours of sleep
- Increased talkativeness, feeling pressure to keep talking
- Racing thoughts, continuous stream of ideas that may be fragmentary
- Being easily distracted
- Increase in activity that is goal-directed
- Being overly involved in pleasurable activities that are potentially risky or could have painful consequences

**Adapted with permission from The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision, Copyright 2000. American Psychiatric Association.*

People with cyclothymia often experience feelings of irritability, annoyance, or frustration in addition to the symptoms listed above. They may be quick-tempered, react hastily, and display occasional outbursts of anger, even over small things. Friends or family may regard the person with cyclothymia as moody, unreliable, or unpredictable.

In fact, it is quite common for people with cyclothymia to have significant problems in their relationships with partners, family, and friends. They may get into arguments at the drop of a hat. Conflicts may seem to come out of nowhere. They can be difficult to get along with consistently. Their proneness to reactivity can lead to an avalanche of emotions and extreme behaviors capable of seriously damaging, if not destroying, important relationships. These and other difficulties can plunge the person with cyclothymia into periods of sullen introspection, shame, guilt, and social embarrassment over their actions.

When engaging in the gregarious and outgoing behaviors associated with hypomania, those with cyclothymia may come across as very charming. They seem warm and inviting. People are often drawn to this kind of energy and self-confidence. It is not unusual for people with cyclothymia to have had numerous, yet brief, intense romantic relationships, perhaps with partners who are unsuitable for them. For some, marriages or committed relationships may be forever damaged by extramarital affairs or brief sexual liaisons. The risk-taking behaviors of hypomania can manifest in poor judgment and actions that have serious consequences.

The workplace does not go unaffected. Those with cyclothymia may have a history of variable work performance, sometimes struggling to keep the same job for a length of time. They can be argumentative, easily frustrated, inconsistent, and difficult to get along with. For some, hypomania can enhance productivity, but for others, it can create disorganization and unfocused energy that leads to a drop in work performance. The lows of depression can also affect functioning at work and lead to problems with motivation, concentration, energy, and self-image.

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EXCERPT FROM THE CYCLOTHYMIA WORKBOOK

Helen's and Marcus's stories illustrate some of the difficulties that may arise in the lives of those with cyclothymia. We will follow their stories throughout the entire workbook. [...] Jerry and Maria describe how their mood swings affect their relationships and work. We will follow them, along with Helen and Marcus, throughout the rest of the workbook.

Helen

Helen, a thirty-four-year-old mother of two, remembers her mood swings beginning when she was a freshman in college. She recalls, "My roommates thought I was pretty moody and snappy. I didn't really see it at the time. One day my best friend took me aside and told me she felt as if she had to walk on eggshells around me. Sometimes I would go out and party with my friends for days. I felt good. I was the life of the party. Other times I really didn't want to go out at all. I would get the blues for a week or so and really keep to myself."

Marcus

Marcus, age twenty-eight, is single and a talented computer programmer. He has had difficulties at work, however, having been fired from three companies in the span of six years. According to Marcus, "Some people just don't do things efficiently. They get on my case when I try to tell them how they can do things better." Marcus acknowledges that while he has been able to churn out a number of impressive computer programs in short periods of time, he has also missed some important deadlines. He chalks these up to "not feeling motivated" and "having a hard time focusing on work."

...

Jerry

Jerry is forty-seven years old, has four children, and has been married three times. Jerry admits that he has had a problem with his temper for most of his life and that it has hurt a number of important relationships. He says, "I just go off sometimes and yell too much. I always regret it later on. My first wife and I used to argue a lot, and I would get on her about stupid little things. My two oldest kids don't have much to do with me anymore. They said I can be unpredictable and moody." Jerry goes on to say, "I can be irritable one minute and then kind of down the next. My current wife is a good lady. She just puts up with me."

Maria

Maria is a twenty-year-old college student majoring in English literature. She does well in school and particularly enjoys writing short stories. Maria has noticed that she goes through phases in which she feels creative and her writing flows easily. Other times, however, she struggles with writer's block and gets down on herself and her abilities. Maria says, "When I write well, I have my muse with me. The words come with little effort. I can stay focused on my writing for long periods of time, and the hours seem to pass quickly. During those times, I feel like I can write a great novel." Maria's mother and maternal grandfather have bipolar disorder and have struggled for years with their symptoms. While she has seen her mother take on large projects in her career as a fine artist, working for days with little or no sleep, Maria doesn't believe she has ever been as "obsessed" as her mother about her work.

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CYCLOTHYMIA: SIDE BAR

How Others See You

Think for a moment about how your cyclothymia affects others, how your behaviors affect the various relationships you have at home, at work, and with friends. Have you heard any of the following statements from people around you? Perhaps too many times?

- "I have to walk on eggshells around you."
- "You make me responsible for how you feel."
- "I feel I have to keep things stress free."
- "I have to predict your feelings and behaviors."
- "I can tell when I need to steer clear of you."
- "You won't let me help you."
- "I don't know what to do to help you."
- "I don't understand your moodiness."
- "You are so sensitive."
- "You take things personally."
- "I have difficulty trusting you."
- "You blame me for all our problems."
- "You embarrass me."

What else have you heard people tell you about your moods, behaviors, and thoughts?