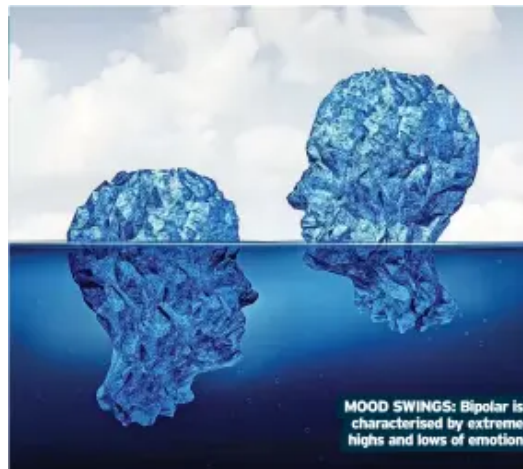


- Manic-depressive illness

What is bipolar and what are the warning signs?

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Celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal has revealed he's been diagnosed with bipolar.



The restaurateur was previously diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in 2017, and says his neurodivergence is his “superpower”.

So, what is bipolar and how does it affect people?

Charity Bipolar UK estimates that over a million adults in the UK have it. However, it's also estimated at least half a million people with bipolar in the UK are undiagnosed.

The condition is thought to have a genetic link – evidence suggests those with a parent with bipolar have around a 10% chance of developing the condition, and those with two bipolar parents have up to a 70% chance of having it.

Mood changes

A serious mental health condition, bipolar causes significant mood swings, ranging from highs (hypermania or mania) to lows (depression), as well as a mix of both, where symptoms of depression and mania occur at the same time between periods of stability.

“It's characterised by extreme highs and lows of emotion, and energy as well,” says Simon Kitchen, CEO of Bipolar UK.

“The problem with bipolar is if it's not managed, it can tip over into full-blown manic episodes, where it's like a train running down a mountain – it can't stop itself,” he adds.

Diagnosis is key

There is effective treatment for bipolar, however Simon says 60% of people living with the condition get no treatment or support, and it takes an average of nine-and-a-half years to get an accurate diagnosis. As a result, undiagnosed people can carry a lot of shame about their behaviour.

“It really damages family relationships. Whereas if you know you've got a mental health condition and that's what's caused your behaviour, it doesn't make the impact necessarily easier, but it means the person living with the condition doesn't have the same level of shame.”

How do you treat bipolar?

Mood stabiliser medication can be used to treat bipolar, often in conjunction with an anti-psychotic to manage mania, or an antidepressant to “bring them up slightly”, explains Simon. The most common mood stabiliser is lithium, although Simon points out that some people respond better to different medications. Psychological therapies, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling, can also be helpful.

Living well with bipolar

“Most people, when they first find out they’ve got a diagnosis, they see it as ‘this is the end of my life, I’ve got a really severe mental health condition, I can’t do well with it’. In reality, the diagnosis is the start of their life getting better,” says Simon. “It’s not easy, but they can get in control of this thing. And meeting other people who have been through that journey, and being able to support each other through it, is powerful.

“Talking about mental health, and bipolar in particular, shouldn’t be taboo – that’s really critical.”