

# Comorbidities common in bipolar disorder, may have genetic link

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While the symptoms of bipolar disorder can be disabling on their own, most patients with the condition also are afflicted with a variety of other psychiatric, substance use and physical disorders. These comorbid conditions can complicate treatment and diagnosis.

Research findings on genetic links between bipolar disorder and other conditions and the incidence of such comorbidities will be presented at the Seventh International Conference on Bipolar Disorder.

According to Allan H. Young, LEEF Chair, Depression Research, and professor of psychiatry, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, people who have bipolar disorder are at increased risk for other psychiatric syndromes including anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and problems with substance use. These psychiatric comorbidities, accompanied by medical comorbidities common in people with bipolar, including heart disease, cancer, endocrine disorders and autoimmune disorders, lead to complications, overall poor health and a decreased life expectancy.

Research presented by Willem A. Nolen, M.D., Ph.D., of the University Medical Center, University of Groningen, Netherlands, shows that genetic factors may play a role in the development of comorbidities in people with bipolar disorder. Researchers observed an increased prevalence of bipolar disorder among twins and parents and children with autoimmune thyroiditis. These findings indicate a genetic risk factor for the disease.

In Dr. Nolen's study of people with autoimmune thyroiditis, they found that those who also had bipolar disorder had abnormalities in 21 mRNAs, which contain codes for inflammation, cell survival and cell death, among other things. If confirmed by further study, these findings could lead to new avenues for diagnosing and treating bipolar disorder and suggest that high rates of medical comorbidities can be explained by genetic factors.

Source: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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