

Cyclothymic Disorder

When Unpredictable Mood Shifts Drive the Need to Self-Medicate

What is Cyclothymic Disorder?

Cyclothymic Disorder is a chronic mood condition on the bipolar spectrum marked by ongoing cycles of emotional highs and lows that never reach the severity of full mania or major depression. These constant, unpredictable mood shifts disrupt relationships, decision-making, and daily stability, often for years before being correctly diagnosed.



What Does it Look Like?

- **Unpredictable Mood Cycling**
Alternating highs and lows with no clear pattern or warning.
- **Impulsive Behavior During Highs**
Reckless spending, risky decisions, or choices that seem out of character.
- **Emotional Overreaction**
Small setbacks create intense distress; minor wins bring excessive excitement.
- **Chronic Instability**
Jobs, relationships, and plans constantly disrupted by shifting moods.

How Does Cyclothymic Disorder Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with cyclothymic disorder, the constant emotional instability and inability to predict their own moods make substances the fastest way to feel steady.

- 1) **Mood Instability Drives Self-Medication**
Substances offer temporary relief from the exhausting cycle of highs and lows.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Miss the Pattern**
Cyclothymia is often misdiagnosed, so the real condition goes untreated.
- 3) **Without Stabilizing Mood, Use Continues**
They leave treatment still cycling through emotional states with no new tools.

Prevalence:

0.4-1% of U.S. adults, though widely underdiagnosed¹

Co-Occurrence:

Up to 50% develop a substance use disorder in their

Relapse Risk:

Significantly increased risk of relapse and treatment dropout³

Sources: ¹ APA, DSM-5-TR (2022); Merck Manual Professional Edition ² Perugi et al., Current Neuropsychopharmacology (2017); Quello et al., Addiction Science & Clinical Practice (2005) ³ Bielecki & Gupta, StatPearls (2023), NCBI Bookshelf

Long-Term Treatment for Cyclothymic Disorder and Addiction

Cyclothymic disorder is often misdiagnosed—mistaken for depression, anxiety, or a personality disorder. Short-term programs end up treating the wrong diagnosis and don't address what's actually driving the substance use.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the time needed to accurately identify cyclothymic disorder, stabilize mood patterns, and build real coping skills. Clients advance when they demonstrate sustained emotional regulation.



“Cyclothymic disorder hides in plain sight. Most clients who have it arrive with three or four prior diagnoses that never quite fit. Until you stabilize the mood cycling underneath, every other intervention is built on unstable ground.”

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Cyclothymic Disorder

When cyclothymic disorder goes undiagnosed, substance use becomes the default response to mood instability. Without identifying and treating the underlying mood cycling, relapse risk remains.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Undiagnosed mood cycling sustains self-medication.
- **Stabilizing Mood Over Time**
Consistent emotional regulation requires months to develop.
- **Providing Enough Time for Accurate Diagnosis**
Cyclothymia's shifting presentation demands extended observation.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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