

Spending “Frenzy” May Point To Health Issue

(NAPSA)—Everyone enjoys an occasional shopping spree, but over-the-top spending frenzies may signal a mental health issue. In a recent survey conducted by StrategyOne, more than half of people with bipolar disorder reported that excessive spending was an early symptom of the manic side of their illness. Manic spending, and the financial turmoil that often results, may indicate bipolar disorder, a psychiatric condition in which phases of depression alternate with manic behaviors such as mood swings, irritability, racing thoughts, decreased need for sleep and impulsiveness.

“Excessive goal-focused behavior—like shopping, sexual activity or even exercising—is a hallmark of mania we look for when we evaluate someone for bipolar disorder,” says Pat Gillette, M.D., a physician from Medford, Ore., who treats many patients with the condition. “Many of the patients with bipolar disorder have exhibited this drive, with manic shopping or spending very common.”

Dr. Gillette believes family and friends play a key role in helping to distinguish whether a loved one’s spending habits may indicate a problem. Dr. Gillette offers three key questions to consider.

Reasonable Spree Or Manic Burst?

Says Dr. Gillette: “The normal shopping enthusiast gets gratifi-

cation from the purchase. They’re thrilled to get a great bargain or find the perfect gift.” He explains that if someone is spending manically, the gratification is in the shopping spree itself. The person may seem frantic to get to the mall and compelled to purchase a large number of unnecessary or expensive items in which they quickly lose interest.

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On Budget Or Unconcerned?

Nearly half of respondents in the survey named debt or bankruptcy as consequences of their untreated manic behavior.

Dr. Gillette says that often, people experiencing mania seem unconcerned with their budget, and give no thought as to how they will pay for their purchases. Gently ask your loved one how much they spent. A shopping enthusiast will likely be able to estimate their spending, and may even acknowledge being a bit extravagant.

On the other hand, says Dr. Gillette, “Someone experiencing mania probably would be unable

to tell you how much they spent or what they bought. Even if they could, they wouldn’t understand the implications of their spree.”

Personality Or Part Of A Pattern?

The most important factor is whether shopping sprees occur alongside other manic symptoms, such as severe mood swings, racing thoughts, irritability, decreased need for sleep or grandiose thinking. “People who are manic have fast moods, fast speech, fast thoughts and fast activities,” says Dr. Gillette. “They may engage in other impulsive behaviors as well—perhaps speeding, abusing alcohol or being reckless sexually.” Additionally, Dr. Gillette recommends keeping a watchful eye for depressive symptoms, such as sadness, hopelessness, lack of interest and social withdrawal.

According to the survey, 70 percent of people with bipolar disorder are misdiagnosed with depression first. That may be because manic symptoms are easily overlooked as personality flaws. Depressive symptoms, on the other hand, are easier to recognize. Dr. Gillette recommends that people who are concerned about their loved one’s behavior encourage him or her to seek evaluation from a mental health professional. For more information, visit www.isitreallydepression.com.