

Lithium

Lithium is a mood stabilizer. It is most often used in bipolar disorder to prevent or treat mania or depression.

What forms does lithium come in?

- › Capsules and long-acting tablets (lithium carbonate)
- › Liquid (lithium citrate)

What symptoms will lithium help with?

- Lithium treats different symptoms depending on why it is being used. Symptoms will be different from person to person.
- Symptoms of **mania** may include:
 - › Feeling like you need less sleep; becoming more talkative, more active, or more irritable; being easily distracted; or feeling important, powerful, or like nothing can hurt you.
- Symptoms of **depression** may include:
 - › Low mood; feeling sad, hopeless, and/or helpless; changes in your usual sleep pattern; loss of interest in things you usually enjoy; changes in your appetite; loss of energy and/or concentration, thoughts of suicide.
- There may be other reasons lithium was chosen for you. Talk to your doctor or nurse to learn why it was prescribed for you.

How is my dose of lithium chosen?

- Your dose of lithium is based on how much lithium is in your blood and how you respond to treatment.
- Blood work is necessary to measure your lithium levels to make sure that you are getting the right dose.
- Blood work will be needed more often when you first start treatment, and less often over time.
- Lithium is usually taken once a day at bedtime, but may be taken 2 or 3 times a day. Your health care provider will talk with you about what is best for you.

How quickly will lithium work?

- Your symptoms will improve over time. It may take 10-14 days before you feel the full effect.
- You may be given other medications to help with your symptoms until the lithium starts working.

How long should I take lithium?

- This depends on why you are taking lithium and how well it works for you. Long term use is common when lithium is used to treat bipolar disorder.
- Lithium helps to treat your symptoms and to keep them from coming back.
- Stopping lithium should be done with the support and advice of your doctor. You may become unwell again if you stop taking it.

What are the possible side effects of lithium?

- Some side effects start early and go away with time. Other side effects only start after taking lithium for some time.
- Some side effects are mild and others are more serious.
- **It is recommended that you talk about side effects with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist regularly, including at the start of your treatment and throughout.**
 - › **Common:** nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, general weakness, feeling tired, trouble concentrating, weight gain, slightly shaky hands, feeling more thirsty, peeing more often, sexual dysfunction, dry skin, acne, thyroid changes
 - › **Less common:** slow heartbeat, heart rhythm changes, changes in your period, hair thinning, rash, decreased kidney function
 - › **Signs of lithium toxicity (too much lithium) – GET HELP RIGHT AWAY if you have any of these side effects:** loss of balance, slurred speech, increased nausea/vomiting/diarrhea, tremors that stop you from holding a cup, muscle spasms, drowsiness, confusion, seizures.

What else do I need to know about lithium?

- Blood work to check your lithium levels is usually done in the morning. If you take lithium in the morning, do not take it until after your blood work is done.
- It is important to drink 8-12 glasses of water/fluid every day.
- Limit how much caffeine you drink (e.g., coffee, tea, dark pop) and avoid drinking alcohol.
- Talk with your doctor before changing how much salt you eat because this can affect the amount of lithium in your body.
- Many medications may affect lithium levels. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medicines, including ones you buy at the drugstore and any natural health products you may be using.
- If you are sick (especially if you are vomiting or have diarrhea) talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about whether you should take lithium that day.
- Be very careful in hot weather and during activities that cause you to sweat a lot. Losing water and salt can affect the amount of lithium in your body.
- Tell your doctor right away if you think you are pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only. The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. If you have ANY questions about your medication, please ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.