

Lithium

What is lithium?

LITHIUM helps to control extreme mood swings in manic-depressive illness. Lithium helps you to maintain a more balanced state, without swinging from a highly elated, over-excited state to that of being very sad and depressed. Lithium can prevent or reduce these episodes. Generic lithium extended-release tablets are available.

What should I tell my health care provider before I take this medicine?

They need to know if you have any of these conditions:

- dehydration (diarrhea or sweating)
- heart or blood vessel disease
- kidney disease
- leukemia
- low level of salt in the blood, or low-salt diet
- Parkinson's disease
- psoriasis
- seizures (convulsions)
- under-active thyroid, or thyroid disease
- an unusual or allergic reaction to lithium, other medicines, foods, dyes, or preservatives
- pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- breast-feeding

How should I take this medicine?

Take lithium extended-release tablets by mouth. Follow the directions on the prescription label. Swallow the tablets whole with a drink of water; do not break, crush or chew. Take after a meal or snack to avoid stomach upset. Take your doses at regular intervals. Do not take your medicine more often than directed. Do not stop taking except on your prescriber's advice.

Contact your pediatrician or health care professional regarding the use of this medicine in children. Special care may be needed.

Elderly patients over age 65 years may have a stronger reaction to this medicine and need smaller doses.

What if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you can. If it is almost time for your next dose (less than 4 hours), take only that dose. Do not take double or extra doses.

What drug(s) may interact with lithium?

- antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, or COX-2 inhibitors, such as celecoxib)
- caffeine
- calcium iodide
- carbamazepine

- filgrastim, G-CSF, or pegfilgrastim
- guarana
- medicines for diabetes
- medicines for high blood pressure
- medicines for mental problems and psychotic disturbances
- metronidazole
- potassium iodide, KI
- sodium bicarbonate
- sodium chloride
- verapamil
- water pills

Tell your prescriber or health care professional about all other medicines you are taking, including non-prescription medicines, nutritional supplements, or herbal products. Also tell your prescriber or health care professional if you are a frequent user of drinks with caffeine or alcohol, if you smoke, or if you use illegal drugs. These may affect the way your medicine works. Check with your health care professional before stopping or starting any of your medicines.

What side effects may I notice from taking lithium?

Side effects that you should report to your prescriber or health care professional as soon as possible:

More common:

- diarrhea
- drowsiness
- loss of appetite
- muscle weakness
- nausea, vomiting
- slurred speech

These symptoms can progress to:

- blurred vision
- clumsiness or loss of balance
- confusion
- dizziness
- seizures
- trembling

Rare or uncommon:

- difficulty speaking or swallowing
- fainting
- hair loss
- hoarseness
- slow, fast, or irregular heartbeat (palpitations)
- pain, coldness, or blue coloration of fingers or toes
- rough, dry skin
- sensitivity to cold
- swelling in the neck

- unusual tiredness or weakness
- unusual weight gain

Side effects that usually do not require medical attention (report to your prescriber or health care professional if they continue or are bothersome):

- increased thirst
- increased frequency and urgency to pass urine
- muscle twitches
- nausea
- skin rash
- stomach bloating, full feeling
- trembling of the hands

What should I watch for while taking lithium?

Visit your prescriber or health care professional for regular checks on your progress. It can take several weeks of treatment to get improvement in your condition. You must continue to take lithium at regular intervals even when your symptoms are better. Do not stop taking lithium except on your prescriber's advice. The amount of lithium you take is very important. Taking more than the prescribed dose can cause serious side effects.

You are taking a slow-release form of lithium. Do not change with any other brand without your prescriber's advice.

The amount of salt (sodium) in your body influences the effects of lithium, and lithium can increase salt loss from the body. Eat a normal diet that includes salt. Do not change to salt substitutes. Avoid changes involving diet, or medications that include large amounts of sodium (such as sodium bicarbonate). Ask your prescriber or health care professional for advice if you are not sure.

Drink plenty of fluids while you are taking lithium. Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea and colas. You will need extra fluids if you have diarrhea or sweat a lot. This will help prevent toxic effects from lithium. Be careful not to get overheated during exercise, saunas, hot baths, and hot weather. Consult your prescriber or health care professional if you have a high fever or persistent diarrhea.

You may get dizzy, drowsy, or have blurred vision. Do not drive, use machinery, or do anything that needs mental alertness until you know how lithium affects you.

Make sure that family members or friends know of early signs of lithium toxicity (see side effects above).

If you are going to have surgery, tell your prescriber or health care professional that you are taking lithium.

Where can I keep my medicine?

Keep out of the reach of children in a container that small children cannot open.

Store at room temperature between 15 and 30 degrees C (59 and 86 degrees F). Keep container tightly closed. Protect from light. Throw away any unused medicine after the expiration date.

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NOTE: This information is not intended to cover all possible uses, precautions, interactions, or adverse effects for this drug. If you have questions about the drug(s) you are taking, check with your health care professional.

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