

Make everyday life work with Lithionit[®] (lithium)

Some tips and advice if you are being treated with
lithium or if you are a relative of someone who is



For people receiving Lithionit (lithium)

We have produced this brochure as an aid for those who are receiving treatment with lithium. Here you can read more about your disorder, your medicine and what is important to think about when you are being medicated with lithium. With the right knowledge it is easier to follow the treatment and achieve the best conditions to feel well in your daily life.

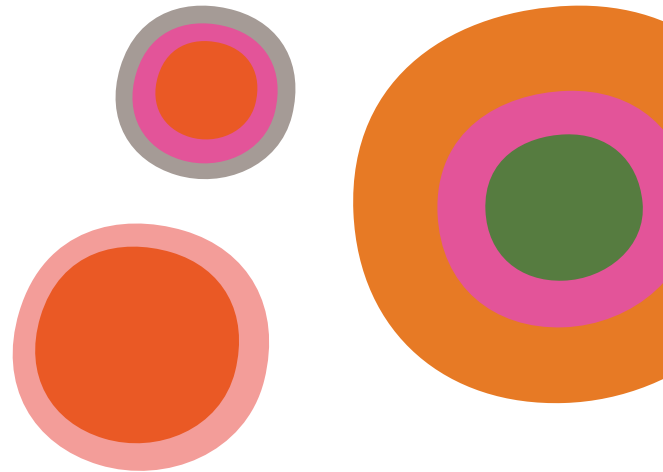
Even as a relative, you can benefit from the information. It can for example be good to know how medication with lithium works and why it is so important to take the medicine as prescribed. As a relative you can be a valuable support in the treatment.

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For medical questions and concerns about Lithionit, please contact Karo Healthcare's medical department, www.karohealthcare.com/contact/

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Illustration by Kari Modén/VOL





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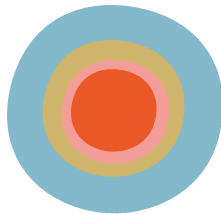
WHAT IS LITHIUM?

Lithium is a medicine that is used to prevent mania and depression and to treat the manic states of bipolar disorder. Lithium has been used for several decades and is still the most common treatment for bipolar disorder today.

Lithionit contains the active substance lithium sulphate and is one of the most prescribed lithium medicines in Sweden. This is also the medicine you have been prescribed by your doctor.

Natural substance

Lithium is a natural element that is closely related to sodium (which is found in common table salt) and potassium. It is found in nature, primarily in the mineral petalite, which was discovered by the Brazilian mineralogist, José Bonifácio da Silva, in a mine on Utö in the Stockholm archipelago in 1800. 17 years later, the Swedish chemist, Johan August Arfwedsson, was the first in the world to extract the element lithium from petalite.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Research has shown that around 1–2 % of the adult population has bipolar disorder and if you include mild forms it is even more. Some people are born with a lower resistance to the disorder and therefore run a greater risk of being affected than others – a biological vulnerability that is largely hereditary. Most people first become ill sometime between puberty and 30 years of age and after that the mental disorders usually come and go in periods. Between periods of illness, you can be symptom-free and feel just as you usually do.

It is not possible to cure bipolar disorder but with lithium treatment you can have fewer periods of illness and milder symptoms. Some people become completely symptom-free when they use lithium. It is possible to use lithium in combination with therapy, but psychological treatment alone is not enough for bipolar disorder.



WHEN THE MIND IS OUT OF BALANCE

Having bipolar disorder means that you often go on an emotional rollercoaster between two completely different states of mind – depression and mania or hypomania.

Mania

Being manic means that you are so elated, energetic and optimistic that those around you perceive this as abnormal and disturbing. Rapid mood swings are also very common. Laughter and joy can turn into tears, and positive feelings can quickly change to irritation and aggressiveness. You yourself are almost never aware of the mania, but for those around you it is very clear. In some cases, mania leads you to become extremely overactive and lose perception of reality. This is called manic psychosis.

When people come out of the mania, they often feel remorse, guilt and shame that their behaviour has affected others around them. Damaged relationships can take time to repair and it is therefore important to quickly stop the mania with treatment.

To be diagnosed mania, your doctor will check whether several of the following symptoms are present at the same time*:

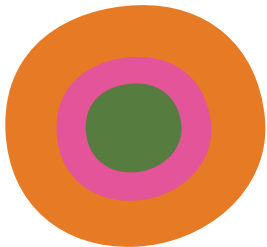
- **Increased self-confidence.** You feel great and have a self-confident attitude.
- **Insomnia and sleep disorders.** A decreased need for sleep means that you can be up and about almost around the clock and yet feel thoroughly rested.
- **Excessively talkative.** You talk a lot and can be difficult to control in a conversation.
- **Racing thoughts.** Thoughts rush through your head. You quickly make associations, alternate between topics and feel brilliant and superior to others.
- **Difficult to focus.** Feel distracted and have difficulty in completing ideas and activities that you have started. You constantly change your plans and are easily drawn to things that are not important.
- **Increased energy and activity.** You feel restless and can indulge in work, school or social activities to the extent that the people around you may find it disturbing and creates concern.
- **Reckless behaviour.** You are unaware of risks and have difficulty in setting boundaries, which means that you can recklessly waste, gamble or give away money. Mania can also cause you to drive carelessly, lose your sense of sexual boundaries, drink too much alcohol or follow sudden impulses that can have negative consequences.

Hypomania

Hypomania is a mild variant of mania that can lead to feeling more elated and creative than usual. Although hypomania produces milder symptoms, it is important to detect it in good time to prevent it from developing into mania.

Although the symptoms are milder than mania, hypomania means that you:

- Feel restless and changeable
- Become more talkative than usual
- Need less sleep
- Do things without thinking
- Behave irresponsibly



Depression

Someone who is depressed is deeply sad for a long period of time. Everyday problems are magnified into insurmountable obstacles and you fantasise about difficulties that exist in the future or ponder about problems that affected you earlier in life. Sometimes it can be difficult to find any reason why you are affected by depression but modern research indicates that heredity can increase the risk. External factors like stress and difficult life events often play a part too. A depression usually causes a lot of suffering while it lasts but can often be treated successfully with medicines and/or psychotherapy.



If you are depressed you can have any of these symptoms*:

- **Sadness.** Often think that everything feels hopeless and just want to cry. The sadness is often worse in the morning.
- **Lack of joy.** You have a reduced interest in what you usually like and don't feel you are getting as much out of life than other people.
- **Decreased or increased appetite and weight.** The appetite is often poor, which can lead to severe weight loss. Some people react the opposite way and instead eat more than usual.
- **Difficulty sleeping.** The need for sleep increases, while at the same time it can still be difficult to sleep. Sleep becomes intermittent and you often wake up early in the morning, feel anxious and have difficulty getting back to sleep.
- **Suppression or restlessness.** Some people have difficulty thinking, which can mean that body movements are also affected and become slower. Others become restless instead and have difficulty sitting still.
- **Lack of energy.** You feel lethargic almost every day and have difficulty in starting and completing things as you usually do.
- **Feelings of inadequacy.** It is common to have remorse and feelings of guilt towards people around you for no reason.

- **Concentration difficulties.** Hard to keep thoughts together and take in information in for example newspapers, TV and conversations.
- **Decreased lust for life and suicidal thoughts.** Depression can lead to suicidal thoughts, suicidal plans or suicide attempts.
- **Decreased sex drive.** Have difficulty feeling emotions. Interest in sex decreases and can sometimes completely disappear. When the depression has passed, interest will however usually return.
- **Anxiety and worry.** Feeling tense, anxious and afraid is common when you are depressed. These feelings can sometimes be so strong that they conceal the depression itself.
- **Indecisiveness.** It is difficult to make decisions, even when it comes to the simplest things.
- **Irritability.** Little things that do not usually irritate you can make you erupt involuntarily. This can often reinforce the feelings you already bear.
- **Physical symptoms.** Common symptoms of depression are constipation and a dry mouth. Many people are also plagued by pain in joints, muscles and stomach. You can also experience shortness of breath and palpitations.

Cycloid psychosis

A cycloid psychosis is a type of mixed form of bipolar disorder and a psychosis. It is a recurring disorder, where feelings and thoughts do not match with reality. One moment you are elated and then the next deeply sad. You can become confused, have hallucinations and delusions, often so-called megalomaniacal notions (delusions of grandeur) rooted in religion.

Mixed episodes and rapid cycling

Most people have separate episodes of mania and depression, but some people can have symptoms of both states of mind at the same time. They are called mixed episodes. During a mixed episode the switches between symptoms may come so rapidly that you have both manic and depressive states on one and the same day. If you have more than five periods of mania or depression a year, it is usually called “rapid cycling”. About 5–15 % of everyone with bipolar disorder have rapid cycling and it is slightly more common in women than men.



GETTING STARTED WITH LITHIUM

To be treated with lithium, you have to first be diagnosed by a doctor. You can begin the treatment during the period of illness itself or afterwards but to reduce the risk of relapse, it is good if you can get your medication started as soon as possible. Sometimes, the treatment begins at hospital.

When you are treated with lithium, it is important to take the medicine in accordance with the prescription so that it has the best possible effect. You need to take the tablets continuously to prevent relapses of mania and depression, even during periods when you feel well.

Treatment important for health

During 2025, more than 25,000 patients in Sweden were prescribed lithium*. Lithium treats both manic and depressive phases of bipolar disorder. The treatment is important for health and well-being and improves the quality of life for people with bipolar disorder. The goal of the treatment is to have as good an effect with as few side effects as possible.

*Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), Pharmaceutical Statistics Database. Number of patients who collected a prescription for medicines classified under ATC code N05AN01 (lithium), nationwide, both sexes, all ages, 2025.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

Lithium is a mood-stabiliser that can prevent recurring periods of mania and depression in both older and younger people. With lithium treatment, periods of illness become fewer and milder and many people become completely symptom-free.

Researchers do not know exactly how lithium works in the body but probably the substance affects processes in the brain's nerve cells. The effect comes gradually and the dose is gradually increased until the medication takes full effect, which can take up to one year. Sometimes people have to add other medication for the treatment to be as effective as possible. The effect of lithium remains as long as you take your tablets.

There is no risk of dependence when you use lithium.

How lithium is absorbed by the body

Many patients in Sweden are treated with Lithionit, a lithium medicine. It is formulated as a prolonged-release tablet, providing a steady release of lithium in the body. The tablet shell can sometimes be seen in stools because it is not absorbed by the body. It is completely harmless and nothing you need concern yourself about.

The tablets should be swallowed whole.

SETTING THE RIGHT DOSE

Lithium is excreted differently by different people and your doctor adapts the dose according to your needs. The difference between the amount of lithium that produces an optimal effect and a dose that can produce side effects is very small. It is therefore important that you always take the tablets according to the doctor's instructions.

The dose is determined through blood sample checks where the lithium concentration is measured. In order to feel well, it is important that you attend all sample-taking appointments that you are summoned to.

Keep in mind!

Because lithium leaves the body via the kidneys, it also affects disturbances in the water and salt balance and the excretion of lithium. Dehydration causes the lithium content in the blood to increase and arises for example when you sweat heavily, have a high fever, exercise intensively, change your diet and in the case of diabetes and surgery. You may therefore need extra fluid and salt when you are being treated with lithium. Talk with your lithium nurse or doctor if you have any questions about this.

Take tests

The lithium levels in the blood must be checked regularly and at the psychiatric clinic there are special procedures for taking tests for people who are treated with lithium. When your lithium value has stabilised, you need to have samples taken about every third to every fourth month.

MEETING YOUR DOCTOR

When your dose is set at a reasonable level and the treatment works well and you feel good, one visit to the doctor a year may be enough. During the visit, the doctor usually asks how you have felt during the year, discusses test results and decides whether the lithium dose needs to be adjusted. The annual check is often a good time to get answers to any questions or concerns, so preferably bring a relative with you. In connection with this annual check-up, a general health check-up is also carried out, when your blood pressure is taken and lifestyle matters such as diet and exercise are discussed. This can happen during the doctor's visit or in another way.

At some clinics, the lithium nurse is involved with the annual check-up and in other places the annual check-up is divided up so that you meet the nurse before the doctor's visit. The lithium nurse then carries out the general health check first and gathers together the results of the different tests, which are then presented at the doctor's visit.

Each year the following checks are made:

- Lithium (measurement of the content in the blood)
- Electrolyte status (measurement of creatinine, potassium, calcium and sodium so as to get a picture of the kidney function)
- Thyroid hormone
- Blood sugar
- Any urine samples



IF YOU EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH THE MEDICINE

All medicine contains active substances that can produce side effects but as long as your lithium dose is set correctly the side effects of lithium are usually few and mild. If you have side effects, they usually arise in the beginning of the treatment and are in many cases transient.

Common side effects can be, for example, loose stools, tremors in your hands, mild nausea and large amounts of urine. Some weight increase, effect on the thyroid function, acne, feeling tired in the arms and legs as well as disturbances in the calcium balance may occur too. To avoid side effects, it is important to have regular samples taken to check that the lithium content is not too high.

Inform your doctor if you are taking other medicine

The effect of the lithium treatment can be affected if you take other medicines at the same time. If you have contact with a doctor other than your psychiatrist, it is important to say that you are receiving treatment with lithium. You can read more about interactions with other medicines in the leaflet that comes with your medicine packaging.

Contact a doctor if symptoms of toxicity occur

If the lithium in the blood becomes too high, you may have symptoms like lethargy, dizziness, difficulty in coordinating muscle

movements, slurred speech, involuntary eye movements, tremors, muscle temperature, diarrhoea, nausea, stomach pain, confusion, severe anxiety, delirium, hallucinations, rapid involuntary muscle twitching and in severe cases cramps, unconsciousness and elevated body temperature. In that case contact your doctor immediately! If you experience severe symptoms such as seizures or loss of consciousness, call 112 immediately.

To bear in mind!

- Contact your lithium nurse or doctor if you experience any side effects.
- If you meet a doctor other than your psychiatrist, it is important to ask about how the medicine that the doctor prescribes works in conjunction with Lithionit.
- Create daily routines for your treatment by, for example, taking your tablet with meals.
- Write down your side effects when you begin the treatment with lithium.
- Also write down your first symptoms for your latest period of illness. How did it begin? Also ask your relatives. In this way, you can learn to recognise a new period of illness while you still have mild symptoms and can get help from healthcare at an early stage.
- Prioritise the taking of samples. It is important for your treatment to work as well as possible.

Read more in the patient leaflet or at Lithionitpatient.se

Lithionit®

litium

Lithionitpatient.se

Developed to give you as a patient
the best conditions in your treatment.

Password for logging in: 005923 or 005708
(the article number on the packaging)



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