

# PHARMACY

## Drug Information

### Mood Stabilisers



#### What are Mood Stabilisers?

- Mood stabilisers are used to reduce clinically significant mood fluctuations, usually for bipolar disorders. They may also be used to control agitation and aggression, or added on to regular treatment with antidepressants for clinical depression.
- Not every mood stabiliser has the same effect on every person. Hence, you may be prescribed more than one mood stabiliser or have your mood stabiliser medication changed if you do not respond to a particular mood stabilizer.
- Lithium carbonate, sodium valproate (Epilim®), carbamazepine (Tegretol®) and lamotrigine (Lamictal®) are commonly prescribed mood stabilisers.

#### How Are Mood Stabilisers Medications Administered / Taken?

- Take your mood stabilisers medications with or after food to minimise gastric irritation.
- Controlled- or slow-release tablets or capsules should not be crushed or chewed. They should be swallowed whole. In some situations, you may be asked to cut them if clinically indicated. Discuss with your doctor or pharmacist if instructed to do so.
- These medicines do not work immediately. Symptoms may take several weeks to improve after starting medication.
- Recovery from the illness may also require long term treatment with the medication, even after improvement of symptoms. Thus, it is important that you take your medication regularly, even if you feel well.
- Do not stop taking your medicines without first consulting your doctor. These medicines prevent symptoms from occurring again, and discontinuing them without your doctor's advice, may result in the recurrence or worsening of symptoms.
- If you miss a dose, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, take only the usual dose. Do not exceed the daily recommended dosage.

### Can Mood Stabilisers be Administered / Taken with Other Medications?

- Avoid alcohol while on mood stabilisers as this can increase drowsiness or dizziness caused by mood stabilizers.
- Mood stabilisers can interact with other medications in many different ways. Please inform your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medications, including supplements, traditional or herbal remedies.

### What are the Important Side Effects of Mood Stabilisers?

- Side effects can occur with any medication use. However, side effects are reduced when medications are taken according to your doctor's instructions.
- If you develop drug allergy symptoms such as rash, facial swelling or shortness of breath, please seek medical attention immediately.
- Contact your doctor if any of these side effects persist or are severe.

Side Effect	Medications	Management
Drowsiness or dizziness	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not drive or operate machinery until drug effects are realized.</li> <li>• Mostly occurs at the start of therapy.</li> </ul>
Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, abdominal pain	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take medication with food.</li> <li>• These side effects may occur during the initiation phase and subside as you get used to the medication.</li> </ul>
Blood disorders (unusual bruising or bleeding), flu-like symptoms (fever, sore throat, mouth ulcer)	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor immediately. Have your blood count checked as instructed by your doctor.</li> </ul>

Rashes	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor immediately.</li> </ul>
Confusion, unsteady gait, speech difficulties	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor immediately.</li> </ul>
Hepatitis (yellowing of skin or eyes and constant abdominal pain)	Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor immediately.</li> <li>• Avoid alcohol.</li> </ul>
Changes in vision (blurred or abnormal vision, double vision)	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your doctor immediately.</li> </ul>
Headache	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may occur at the start of therapy and will subside gradually when your body get used to the medication.</li> </ul>
Muscle weakness	Lithium carbonate Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may occur at the start of therapy and subside.</li> </ul>
Fine tremor	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may occur at the start of therapy and subside gradually after 1-2 weeks.</li> </ul>
Thirst, dry mouth, increased urination	Lithium carbonate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain sufficient fluid intake to prevent dehydration.</li> </ul>
Weight gain		

	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain a healthy diet and exercise regularly</li> </ul>
Hair loss	Lithium carbonate Sodium valproate Carbamazepine Lamotrigine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is harmless and may be temporary.</li> </ul>

### Do I Need Regular Monitoring When Taking These Medicines?

- Before starting on these medications, it is usual for your doctor to order blood tests for you. These may include baseline tests for your kidneys, blood counts, thyroid and liver, and for Carbamazepine, a test to predict likelihood of developing a severe allergic reaction.
- Regular blood tests are required to check your response to the medications and to monitor for any side effects.
- Even if you have been on treatment for a long time, it is important that you have your blood tests done regularly as instructed by your doctor.

*(Genetic testing for HLA-B\*1502 is mandatory prior to initiation of carbamazepine. Patients tested positive for this gene are at an increased risk of developing a severe rash. Your doctor will arrange this blood test for you)*

### Are There any Special Precautions That I Need to Take?

- It is important to inform your doctor if you intend to conceive or breastfeed while taking this medication. Inform your doctor immediately if you discover that you are pregnant.
- Do not switch between brands of Lithium carbonate, as they may not provide the same effect.
- Do not stop the medications suddenly, unless instructed to do so by your doctor.

### What Else can I do to Help My Condition?

- Maintain sufficient water intake and sufficient (but not excessive) salt intake.

### How do I Store These Medications?

- Store your medication in a cool, dry place away from heat, moisture and direct sunlight.

If you have any problem with your treatment, please contact your doctor, pharmacist or nurse clinician.

Please keep all medications out of reach of children.



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PECC-PHA-ED-2019-591-v1