Mood Stabilizers - Lithium

Specific medications: Lithium carbonate or citrate, Lithobid, Lithonate

Use:
- Decrease mood swings
- Decrease agitation, irritability, and insomnia due to manic mood

Risks and side effects:
- Fatigue, poor concentration
- Increased thirst and urination
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea
- Ringing in the ears
- Metallic taste
- Shakiness and tremor
- Increased appetite and weight gain
- Kidney damage
- Increased risk of seizures
- Dry skin and psoriasis
- Thyroid problems
- Irregular heartbeat

Though most medication side effects are not dangerous, they can rarely be medically serious or even life threatening. Let your doctor know if you notice any changes in your health.

Signs of lithium toxicity:
- Dizziness and unsteady gait
- Slurred speech
- Severe tremor
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Excessive drowsiness
- Seizures

Expected onset of action: Your dose of lithium will need to be gradually increased into the therapeutic range over 2-4 weeks. Your doctor will ask you to monitor your blood level with blood tests during this time. Once a therapeutic level of lithium is reached, it may take 1-2 weeks for mood to stabilize.

Use in pregnancy: Lithium was formerly thought to cause heart defects in the developing fetus. More recent studies suggest that this is not the case. However, all the effects of lithium on a developing baby are not known. It is safest to use birth control while taking lithium. Let your doctor know if you may be or wish to become pregnant.

Interactions with other drugs and food: Ibuprofen (Motrin) and some diuretics (water pills) should not be taken with lithium because they can increase the level of lithium in the blood and cause lithium toxicity. Restricting salt in the diet can also increase lithium levels. Street drugs and alcohol should be avoided while taking lithium. People taking lithium should drink a lot of water and avoid becoming dehydrated.

Laboratory monitoring: A lithium blood level and creatinine (a kidney function test) should be checked about every 6 months. Your doctor may want to check your urine and other tests, including an EKG. Thyroid functions should be checked once a year while taking lithium.

Discontinuation effects: Individuals who stop lithium suddenly occasionally experience anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, or an increase in mood swings. This can be avoided by tapering the medication slowly.

I acknowledge that I have discussed this information with my doctor and have received a copy of this form for my records.

Individual Served: ________________________________ Date: ________________

Physician: ________________________________ Date: ________________

[ ] Copy given for guardian