

## **Lithium**

### **I. PURPOSE:**

Lithium Carbonate is used primarily to treat bipolar disorder (manic depressive illness) and schizoaffective disorder. It is especially helpful in controlling symptoms of hypomania and mania. The drug has been used as well to treat some individuals who are depressed and have not responded to other therapies, or who have demonstrated a history of past manic episodes. Lithium is also used to treat symptoms of severe aggression and behavioral disturbance.

### **II. SPECIFIC MEDICATIONS:**

Lithium Carbonate Lithane, Eskalith, Lithobid) and Lithium Citrate.

### **III. SIDE EFFECTS AND OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION:**

Early mild side effects may include mild lethargy, nausea, or diarrhea. Side effects, which may persist, include a mild hand tremor, weight gain, increased thirst and urination, and thyroid and kidney problems. The white blood count sometimes increases with the use of this medication. Thyroid and kidney function as well as the blood count can be followed by serial examinations of the urine and blood.

Toxic effects are associated with blood levels of Lithium above 1.5 - 2.0 meq/1. Warnings that you should stop the medication and go immediately to a medical emergency room area include severe nausea, vomiting, severe diarrhea, stuttering or stammering speech, worsening hand tremor, increased lethargy, and confused thinking or clouded thinking. Contact your therapist afterwards. Serious Lithium toxicity can be life-threatening.

Salt and water balance in your body are very important while taking this medication. Dehydration can cause Lithium toxicity. Do not use diuretics (fluid or water pills) without discussing it with your doctor. Maintain your usual salt intake. Avoid strenuous exercise in hot/humid places. Many acute illnesses can cause Lithium toxicity. Notify your doctor if you develop any acute illness. Lithium has been associated with birth defects. You should talk with your doctor before becoming pregnant if you take Lithium. If you become pregnant while taking the medication, notify your doctor immediately.

It is necessary to monitor the level of Lithium Carbonate in your blood. The blood should be drawn 10 to 12 hours after the last dosage of Lithium (usually early in the morning when the medicine has been taken at bedtime the night before). It will also be necessary to monitor your kidney and thyroid function on a regular basis. This medication is to be stored in a cool, dry place. If you miss a dosage, do not take extra amounts of the medication. It is expected that you will be taking this medication for an extended period of time. See that your medication is refilled on a regular basis.

Inform all other treating physicians of your treatment with this medication. Avoid the use of intoxicating drugs or alcohol. Do not drive or operate heavy machinery until you are sure you can do so safely while taking this medication. Report any side effects to your therapist and physician. Report any prescription and "over-the-counter" medicines you are taking to your therapist and physician. A number of medicines can change Lithium blood levels including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines such as Motrin, Advil and others.

### **COMMENTS:**

IV. By signing, I acknowledge receiving this medication information and verbal explanations.

Client/Responsible Person \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Physician/Therapist \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Gratefully acknowledge Wake County Human Services Staff Psychiatrists who have generously given us permission adapt their original patient education material