



# *Important Drug and Food Information*

From the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center  
Drug-Nutrient Interaction Task Force

## Important information to know when you take:

### Lithium

While you are taking lithium, your doctor will monitor the lithium level in your blood. The aim is to keep the right amount of lithium in your blood so that this medicine can work. It is also important that your lithium level not be too high. High lithium levels can cause shakiness, muscle weakness, slurred speech, nausea or vomiting, and drowsiness.

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#### Guidelines

These diet guidelines will help you keep your lithium blood level stable:

▶ **Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water or other liquids every day.**

Drinking plenty of fluids is important while you are taking lithium. Not drinking enough liquids may cause lithium levels to rise. You may need even more liquids during hot weather and during exercise when you sweat heavily. To avoid weight gain, select water and other non-caloric beverages.

▶ **Keep your salt intake about the same.**

Do not begin a low-salt diet without first talking with your doctor or pharmacist. Do not suddenly increase the salt in your diet either. Less salt may cause your lithium level to rise. More salt may cause your lithium level to fall.

Try to keep your intake of these salty foods about the same from day to day: luncheon meats, ham, sausage; canned or processed meats and fish; packaged mixes; most frozen entrees and meals; soups and broths; processed cheeses like American; salted snack foods; soy sauce; smoked foods; olives, pickles; tomato juice; most fast foods; salt, salt-containing seasonings and condiments like ketchup and meat sauces.

► **Keep your caffeine intake about the same.**

Keep amounts of coffee, tea, cola, and other soft drinks with caffeine about the same from day to day. Less caffeine can cause your lithium level to increase; more caffeine can cause your lithium level to decrease.

► **Avoid alcoholic beverages.**

Check with your doctor or pharmacist about this issue and any questions you have.

► **Take lithium with food or milk.**

This will reduce possible digestive side effects like nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.

## Special Instructions

If you have any questions about these instructions, ask your pharmacist, dietitian, doctor, or nurse.

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This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

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National Institutes of Health Clinical Center  
Bethesda, MD 20892

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