MSK Kids

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Lithium

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it’s used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

Lithobid

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Lithium Carbonate; Carbolith; DOM-Lithium Carbonate; Lithane; Lithmax; PMS-Lithium Carbonate

Warning

- This drug may cause severe side effects at doses that are close to the normal dose. Rarely, this may include death. Do not give your child more of this drug than you are told. Your child will have blood tests to check the level of this drug in the blood. There are many signs of too much lithium in the blood. Closely read the part in this leaflet which lists when to call your child’s doctor.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat bipolar disorder.
- It may be given to your child for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Fluid loss (dehydrated), heart disease, kidney disease, low levels of salt in the blood, or if your child is very sick or weak.
- If your child has a certain heart problem called Brugada syndrome or has ever passed out for an unknown reason.
- If a family member has Brugada Syndrome or has suddenly died before 45 years of age.
- If your child is taking drugs for blood pressure or heart problems. Your child may need to have blood work checked more closely.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell the doctor and pharmacist about all of your child’s drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe to give this drug with all of your child’s other drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug your child takes without checking with the doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

- Tell all of your child’s health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child’s doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- If your child starts on a low-salt diet, tell the doctor. It will change the way your child’s body handles the lithium.

- Have your child avoid tasks or actions that call for alertness until you see how this drug affects your child. These are things like riding a bike, playing sports, or using items such as scissors, lawnmowers, electric scooters, toy cars, or motorized vehicles.
- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- Fever, infection, throwing up, diarrhea, or sweating a lot may change how much of this drug is in your blood. If any of these happen, talk with the doctor.
- Have your child be careful in hot weather or while your child is being active. Have your child drink lots of fluids to stop fluid loss.
- A certain heart problem (Brugada Syndrome) has shown up in some people taking this drug. These people had this problem but did not know it at the time. People with Brugada Syndrome have a heartbeat that is not normal and are at risk for sudden death. Talk with the doctor.
- Brain problems have rarely happened in people taking this drug with certain other drugs like haloperidol. Sometimes, these brain problems have led to long-lasting brain damage. Talk with the doctor.
- If your child is of childbearing age, a pregnancy test may need to be done before starting this drug to show that your child is NOT pregnant.

If your child is pregnant or breast-feeding a baby:

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if your child takes it during pregnancy. If your child is pregnant or gets pregnant while taking this drug, call the doctor right away.
- Tell your child’s doctor if your child is breast-feeding a baby. This drug passes into breast milk and may harm your child’s baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my child’s doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your child’s doctor or get medical help right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of too much acid in the blood (acidosis) like confusion; fast breathing; fast heartbeat; a heartbeat that does not feel normal; very bad stomach pain, upset stomach, or throwing up; feeling very sleepy; shortness of breath; or feeling very tired or weak.
- Signs of thyroid problems like change in weight; feeling nervous, excitable, restless, or weak; hair thinning; depression; eye or neck swelling; not able to focus; trouble with heat or cold; menstrual changes; shakiness; or sweating.
- Signs of fluid and electrolyte problems like mood changes, confusion, muscle pain or weakness, fast or abnormal heartbeat, severe dizziness or passing out, increased thirst, seizures, feeling very tired or weak, decreased appetite, unable to pass urine or change in the amount of urine produced, dry mouth, dry eyes, or severe upset stomach or throwing up.
- Signs of kidney problems like unable to pass urine, change in how much urine is passed, blood in the urine, or a big weight gain.
- Signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- Bloating.
- Diarrhea.

- Giddiness.
- Trouble walking.
- Trouble controlling body movements, twitching, change in balance, trouble swallowing or speaking.
- Muscle weakness.
- Feeling sluggish.
- Not able to control eye movements.
- Mood changes.
- Fever.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).
- Memory problems or loss.
- Restlessness.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- A change in weight without trying.
- Not able to control bladder.
- Not able to control bowels.
- A severe and sometimes deadly problem called serotonin syndrome may happen. The risk may be greater if your child also takes certain other drugs. Call your child’s doctor right away if your child has agitation; change in balance; confusion; hallucinations; fever; a fast or abnormal heartbeat; flushing; muscle twitching or stiffness; seizures; shivering or shaking; sweating a lot; severe diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up; or very bad headache.
- Raised pressure in the brain and swelling in the eye has happened with this drug. This can lead to eyesight problems like loss of eyesight. Call your child’s doctor right away if your child has a very bad headache; ringing in the ears; or eyesight problems like blurred eyesight, seeing double, or loss of eyesight.

If your child is or may be sexually active:

- Sex problems.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your child’s doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child or do not go away:

- Feeling dizzy, sleepy, tired, or weak.
- Upset stomach.
- Decreased appetite.
- Stomach pain.
- More saliva.
- Gas.
- Dry mouth.
- Headache.
- Dry or thin hair.
- Hair loss.
- Change in taste.
- Joint pain.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your child’s doctor. Call your child’s doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best given?

Give this drug as ordered by your child’s doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All products:

- Give this drug with or without food. Give with food if it causes an upset stomach.
- Keep your child’s use of salt the same from day to day.
- Follow what your child’s doctor has told you about the type of liquids and how much liquid your child can drink while taking this drug.

Modified-release tablets:

- Have your child swallow whole. Do not let your child chew or crush.

Liquid (solution):

- Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

- Give a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your child’s next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your child’s normal time.
- Do not give 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- If you are not sure what to do if your child misses a dose, call the doctor.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.

- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your child’s symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child’s doctor.
- Do not share your child’s drug with others and do not give anyone else’s drug to your child.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child’s doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

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If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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