

# Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services

## Drug Information Sheet: **lithium**

Lithium is used in the treatment of bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder to stabilize moods and reduce overactivity, racing thoughts, pressured speech, agitation and insomnia. It also is used to treat certain types of recurrent depression by enhancing the effectiveness of other medications.

Like any medication, lithium can also produce some side effects:

### ***Common***

drowsiness  
increased thirst  
increased urination  
nausea  
upset stomach  
diarrhea

### ***Less Common***

weight gain  
confusion  
thyroid changes  
hand tremor

### ***Rare***

decreased kidney function  
rash  
swelling of hands/feet  
huge increase in thirst  
and urination  
unusual heartbeat

Lithium can be measured in your blood to make sure it is at the right level (usually 0.6-1.2 mEq/L). Initially, blood level testing may be frequent while the dose is being adjusted.

A lithium blood level too high can cause the following symptoms: *vomiting, diarrhea, confusion, muscle weakness, slurred speech, lack of coordination.*

**Lithium needs to be taken as prescribed, without missing or taking extra doses. Missing or taking extra doses could change your lithium blood level, and cause adverse effects.**

**Your physician will monitor your blood level with you, as well as check thyroid and kidney function.**

**Because lithium can cause birth defects, it is important to tell your physician if you become pregnant, or are considering becoming pregnant.**