

Prevent Adverse Lithium Effects with Essential Fatty Acids

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Years ago, a woman visited [Tahoma Clinic](#) on the advice of her psychiatrist. She was “severely bipolar”, requiring a maximum dose of lithium carbonate to keep her symptoms under control. Despite close monitoring of serum lithium levels to maintain a safe range, she was starting to show many signs of lithium toxicity, including hypertension, tremor, nausea, and proteinuria.

She and her psychiatrist had tried other medications, but none provided the control of her bipolar symptoms that lithium did. She asked: “Is there an alternative to either the psych ward or the medical wing?” Fortunately, there is.

Without changing her lithium dose, she was started on flaxseed oil, one tablespoon (15cc’s) three times daily along with 800 IU of vitamin E (mixed tocopherols). One month later, her blood pressure had normalized, her tremor and nausea were gone, and there was no further protein in the urine. Her bipolar symptoms remained under control. She was advised to cut the flaxseed oil to one tablespoon daily along with 400 IU of vitamin E. Several years later, her lithium toxicity hasn’t returned.

I’m grateful to Dr. David Horrobin for the basic information about how to prevent and treat lithium toxicity, as illustrated by this case. Years ago, during a lecture on fatty acid metabolism, he pointed out in passing that lithium could inhibit a vital step, but that this could be overcome by providing more “precursor” fatty acid to overwhelm this inhibition. This simple procedure works *in vivo* as well as *in vitro*.

To be “on the safe side,” flaxseed oil (or other essential fatty acid), along with vitamin E, should be taken daily by anyone taking lithium. With low dose lithium, a teaspoonful—or at most, two daily—is usually sufficient. Flaxseed oil contains omega 6 fatty acids, which can be pro-inflammatory, so if using flaxseed oil for more than a week or two, make sure to “balance” it with an equal or greater amount of omega-3 fatty acids, such as those contained in fish oil.

If you’re using lithium in any quantity, please review this with your physician skilled and knowledgeable in natural medicine.

*From Green Medicine Newsletter, July 16, 2019 Issue, by Dr. Jonathan V. Wright
(www.GreenMedicineNewsletter.com)*