

## About your medication – Lithium (Quilonum SR<sup>®</sup> or Lithicarb<sup>®</sup>)

### What is lithium?

Lithium is known as a mood stabiliser. It is only available on a doctor's prescription.

### What is it for?

The exact way that lithium works is not known. It is used to treat and prevent episodes of bipolar disorder, in which there are mood swings that may vary from states of high excitability and exaggerated emotion to being extremely low and depressed.

It may also be used to treat illnesses of aggressive behaviour or self-harm.

### How to take this medication

It is important that this medication is taken only as directed by your doctor. Do not give this medication to other people even if they have the same illness.

Lithium is often started at a low dose and increased slowly depending on your lithium blood levels. The body's requirement for lithium can change over time and in response to diet, hydration status or illness. Your doctor will conduct regular blood tests to check the heart, kidneys and to ensure that the lithium levels are right so that it is safe for you to take this medication. Use your Lithium Therapy Record Booklet to keep track of these tests and show it to your doctor and pharmacist at each visit.

Lithium is available as immediate release (Lithicarb<sup>®</sup>) or slow-release tablets (Quilonum SR<sup>®</sup>). Each brand of lithium works differently within the body, therefore, it is important that you keep to the same brand of lithium unless it is changed by your doctor.

Lithium should be taken with food to prevent stomach upset. Tablets should be swallowed whole without chewing or crushing them.

Lithium is taken to prevent an illness so you may have to take it in an ongoing way. Never stop taking the tablets without asking your doctor.

### What to do if a dose is missed

If you miss a dose and it is within two hours of your usual dose time, it can be taken as soon as you remember.

Do not take the missed dose if it is close to the next one; just take the next dose as normal. Do not double your next dose.



## Storing the medication

It is important to keep all medicines locked away out of the reach of children. Do not keep any medicines in the bathroom, near the kitchen sink or in other damp, warm places because this may make them less effective.

## Use of other medication

Care must be taken when using lithium with other medications. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving any other medicines including those medicines you buy without a prescription from the pharmacy, supermarket or a health food shop.

This is important for the following medications:

- diuretics (e.g. thiazides, aldosterone).
- sodium bicarbonate
- blood pressure lowering or heart drugs (e.g. calcium channel blockers, ACE inhibitors)
- Theophylline or aminophylline
- antiepileptics (e.g. carbamazepine, phenytoin)
- antidepressants and antipsychotics (e.g. fluoxetine, olanzapine).

This is not a complete list, always check with your pharmacist or doctor before giving other medicines.

## Important information

It is important that this medication is not stopped abruptly.

It is also important to eat a normal diet with adequate salt and fluid intake. Do not suddenly change the amount of salt in the diet as this can change the amount of lithium within your body.

Be alert for the signs and symptoms of lithium toxicity such as extreme thirst, frequent urination, nausea and vomiting. If this occurs seek medical attention immediately. This may occur more often during illness, extreme sweating or low salt or fluid intake.

## Possible side-effects

Lithium may cause side effects in some people. Some of these are not serious and may go away with time.

Others are more serious and require you to check with your doctor.

Some side effects include:

- upset stomach
- dizziness, or feeling lightheaded or drowsiness, or lack of coordination
- weight gain
- swollen ankles or feet
- metallic or altered taste, feeling unusually thirsty
- skin problems.

Contact your doctor as soon as possible if any of the following side effects occur:

- Unexplained fever (temperature greater than 38°C), diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, needing pass urine more often, or are more thirsty than usual.
- Signs of an allergic reaction including rash, fever and facial swelling.

- If your child's seizures increase in number, severity or duration.
- Coarse tremor.

If you are worried about any of these or notice any other effects please contact your child's doctor.

### Dosage forms and strengths available

- Tablet 250mg immediate release (Lithicarb®)
- Tablet 450mg sustained release (Quilonum SR®)

Your hospital pharmacy will advise you if they manufacture any additional dosage forms to the above.

### Contact

If you have any concerns contact your child's doctor or the PCH Pharmacy Department:

- Dispensary: 6456 3560
- Paediatric Medicines Information: 6456 3546 – select option 1.

In case of overdose or poisoning contact the poisons information centre on 13 11 26



Government of **Western Australia**  
Child and Adolescent Health Service

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