### Choosing the Best Mood Stabiliser for You

If you can’t find your medicine in the table, please ask your pharmacist or key worker for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will it help?</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Usual Dose</th>
<th>Most common side effects</th>
<th>Will I need any health checks?</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **If you suffer from periods of high and low mood (bipolar illness), these medicines can help by reducing:**  
  - The number of times you become unwell  
  - The length of time you stay unwell  
  - The severity of your symptoms when unwell  
  - The risk of suicide (particularly lithium) | Lithium  
  *(If you don’t take this medicine regularly or stop it suddenly, you will increase your chances of becoming unwell again)* | Dose usually starts at 400mg at night. Increased according to blood levels.  
  Most people need a blood level of 0.4-1.0mmol/L to stay well. | • Mild stomach upsets, feeling sick, diarrhoea……. usually wear off  
  • Fine hand tremor  
  • Feeling thirsty and passing more urine  
  In the longer term can cause:  
  - An underactive thyroid (this is easily treated).  
  - Problems with passing too much urine.  
  Other medicines can interact with lithium causing blood levels to rise which can be dangerous. You must always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines if you take lithium. | **To start with you will need blood tests every 7 days until you are stabilized on the best dose of lithium for you.**  
**Then you will need repeat tests every 3 months to check the level of lithium in your blood and every 6 months to check that your kidneys and thyroid are working well.**  
**Some people may need a heart trace (ECG).** |
| A good first choice is either lithium, valproate or olanzapine. | Valproate | Usually 1,000mg-2400mg day in 2-3 divided doses | • Feeling sick……this usually wears off  
  • Weight gain  
  • Hair loss with curly regrowth  
  Very rarely, valproate can cause  
  • Bruising or bleeding (tell your doctor straight away if this happens) | **Every year you should have your**  
**- Weight**  
**- Blood pressure**  
**- Blood sugar (test for diabetes).**  
**- Cholesterol (test for risk of heart disease)** measured/tested |
| These medicines are a long-term treatment. | Olanzapine | 10-20mg/day | • Weight gain  
  • Drowsiness when you start treatment | **Most people have blood tests at least once a year to check that their liver & blood are healthy**  
**- Your doctor may want to check how much valproate is in your blood (valproate level).** |
| If one of these mood stabilisers alone is not enough then your doctor may consider adding in a second (usually from lithium, valproate or olanzapine). | Lamotrigine | Usually up to 200mg/day  
  Has to be increased slowly | • Rash  
  • Feeling/being sick  
  • Diarrhoea  
  • Headache  
  Very rarely, lamotrigine can cause  
  • Severe rash including inside your mouth, and bruising or bleeding (contact your doctor straight away if this happens) | **Most people have blood tests at least once a year to check that their liver, kidneys & blood are healthy** |
| If a combination doesn’t help then you may be offered lamotrigine or carbamazepine next. | Carbamazepine | Usually 800-1200mg/day | • Dizziness  
  • Excessive sleepiness  
  • Feeling sick  
  Very rarely, carbamazepine can cause  
  • Severe rash including inside your mouth, and bruising or bleeding (contact your doctor straight away if this happens) | **Blood tests at least once a year to check that your liver, kidneys & blood are healthy**  
**- Your doctor might want to check how much carbamazepine is in your blood (carbamazepine level).** |
| If you suffer from periods of low mood only, the most effective mood stabiliser is lithium. | | | | |