Lithium Orotate: An Overlooked Mineral for Brain Health

Jake Ames, M.D., H.M.D.
Pátzcuaro, Mexico

I have prescribed lithium orotate to my patients since 1994. Most people associate lithium with bipolar disorder and psychiatric treatment, but few realize that lithium is actually a naturally occurring mineral found in soil, water, plants, and food. In my clinical practice, I have found low-dose lithium supplementation to be one of the most valuable tools for supporting brain health, mood stability, sleep quality, and healthy aging.

For more than thirty years, I have recommended lithium orotate to the majority of my patients. Typical dosages range from 5 to 20 mg taken at bedtime. If a patient feels well at 20 mg daily, I generally recommend remaining at that dosage. Occasionally, I use lithium aspartate when a patient does not tolerate lithium orotate.

Over the years, I have seen only a small number of individuals who initially could not tolerate even 1 mg of lithium. In my experience, these cases are uncommon. Most patients are able to start with 5 mg daily and gradually increase to 20 mg if desired.

Lithium Orotate Versus Lithium Carbonate

It is important to distinguish low-dose lithium orotate from prescription lithium carbonate.

Lithium carbonate is commonly prescribed for bipolar disorder and other psychiatric conditions. Typical doses may be 300 mg two or three times daily, or even higher depending on the patient's needs and blood levels. Because these doses are much larger, physicians routinely monitor serum lithium levels and periodically evaluate kidney and thyroid function.

The dosages of lithium orotate that I use are much lower. At 5 to 20 mg daily, I do not routinely measure serum lithium levels. In my clinical experience, these supplemental dosages have been well tolerated by most patients.

Safety and Side Effects

At supplemental dosages, lithium orotate is generally well tolerated. Occasionally, some individuals may feel slightly sleepy, especially when lithium is taken during the daytime. For this reason, I usually recommend bedtime administration.

Prescription-strength lithium carbonate can produce significant side effects when blood levels become excessive. These may include thyroid dysfunction, tremors, confusion, increased thirst, digestive symptoms,

heart rhythm disturbances, and other complications. Such effects are associated with pharmaceutical dosing and are not typically seen with low-dose supplemental lithium.

As with any supplement, individuals with kidney disease, thyroid disease, or those taking prescription medications should consult their healthcare practitioner before beginning supplementation.

Potential Benefits of Lithium

Research over the past several decades has suggested that lithium may support multiple aspects of neurological function.

Studies indicate that lithium may:

- Support healthy mood regulation
- Promote normal sleep patterns
- Support healthy aging of the brain
- Encourage neuronal resilience and repair mechanisms
- Support cognitive function and memory
- Help maintain healthy stress responses
- Support mitochondrial function
- Contribute to healthy bone metabolism

Researchers have also observed that regions with naturally higher lithium levels in drinking water often demonstrate lower rates of suicide and certain mood disorders. These findings have generated considerable interest in lithium as an essential trace mineral.

Lithium and Neuroprotection

One of the most fascinating aspects of lithium research is its potential neuroprotective effect. Laboratory and clinical studies suggest that lithium may help support neuronal survival, healthy brain signaling, and the growth of new neural connections.

For this reason, I have often incorporated low-dose lithium into comprehensive treatment programs for patients with mood disorders, sleep disorders, and age-related cognitive concerns.

Lithium and Healthy Longevity

As we age, maintaining healthy brain function becomes increasingly important. Many of my patients begin taking lithium not because they have a specific illness, but because they want to support long-term cognitive health.

In my opinion, lithium deserves far more attention as a nutritional supplement and trace mineral. It is inexpensive, generally well tolerated, and supported by a growing body of scientific literature.

Personally, I take 20 mg of lithium daily and intend to continue doing so for the rest of my life.

Conclusion

Although lithium is widely known as a treatment for bipolar disorder, its role as a trace mineral is often overlooked. In my clinical experience, low-dose lithium orotate can be a valuable addition to a comprehensive wellness program aimed at supporting mood, sleep, stress resilience, and healthy brain aging.

As always, treatment should be individualized, and patients should consult a qualified healthcare practitioner before beginning any new supplement program.

Disclaimer: This article reflects the clinical observations and opinions of the author and is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Individuals taking prescription medications or managing chronic medical conditions should consult their healthcare practitioner before beginning lithium supplementation.