

# Mood Stabilizers

## **Q. Why should I read this?**

A. You may want to read this if you or a member of your family is suffering from, for example, from bipolar affective disorder or depression and is taking a mood stabilizer.

## **Q. Why am I being given this medication?**

A. Doctors can prescribe mood stabilizers for mania and depression in bipolar affective disorder, schizoaffective disorder, and severe depressive disorder.

## **Q. What about Counselling or Therapy?**

A. In most cases of mania and bipolar affective disorder, treatment with a mood stabilizer will be the best course of treatment. Discuss this with your doctor as either counselling or therapy may often be very effective in addition to medication.

## **Q. Do mood stabilizers work?**

A. Studies show that mood stabilizers can be effective in most of those that take them. They must be taken daily or as instructed in the Patient Information Leaflet because if you don't they will not work.

## **Q. Can mood stabilizers make me feel suicidal?**

A. This is difficult to answer. There is no evidence to date that mood stabilizers increase suicidal feelings. However, depression or mania and not receiving treatment can make one feel like self-harming. If you feel like harming yourself then the best thing to do is to go and see your doctor immediately, or if needs be, attend your local Accident & Emergency Department.

## **Q. How long do they take to work?**

A. This depends on the mood stabilizer used and the condition they are used for. Your doctor will tell you how long it may take until you will notice the effect of a mood stabilizer.

## **Q. When can I stop?**

A. The risk of suffering another episode of mania or depression after stopping a mood stabilizer is very high. Therefore, mood stabilizers should only be stopped after discussion with your doctor. Your doctor will weigh up and discuss the risks and benefits of stopping mood stabilizing medication with you.

**Q. Why should I continue to take a mood stabilizer for so long if I feel well?**

A. It is really important to continue taking the mood stabilizer for the amount time suggested by your doctor so as to get the full benefit of the mood stabilizer you are taking and also to try and prevent the mania or depression from coming back.

**Q. Sometimes I hear or read or see that mood stabilizers can be 'bad' for you and I feel like stopping the mood stabilizer. What should I do?**

A. If you have any concerns about the mood stabilizer that you are taking then go and speak to the doctor that gave you the medication or your pharmacist. They may be able to put your mind at rest by putting the risk of taking the mood stabilizer and not taking it into context.

**Q. What side effects do they have?**

A. Different mood stabilizers have different side effects. For side effects of the medication you are taking please see the Patient Information Leaflet that came with your mood stabilizer or if you are in patient in hospital then ask a member of staff for a copy of the Patient Information Leaflet. In general, mood stabilizers are not addictive (physically) like smoking, for example. Some mood stabilizers need to be reduced slowly before stopping. (For side effects about the medication you are taking please see the Patient Information Leaflet that came with your mood stabilizer or if you are in patient in hospital then ask a member of staff for a copy of the Patient Information Leaflet).

**Q. What if I am pregnant or trying for a baby?**

A. Please consult your doctor if you are or think you are pregnant or are nursing and on a mood stabilizer.

**Q. Can I get a mood stabilizer if I am under 18 years of age?**

A. In general, mood stabilizers should only be prescribed to those under the age of 18 years by a qualified medical specialist.

Please keep out of the reach of children

**Q. Can I drink alcohol when I am taking a mood stabilizer?**

A. In general, alcohol is a 'depressant' so if you are feeling depressed taking alcohol may make you feel worse. Please consult the Patient Information Leaflet and if needs be discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist.

**Q. What causes mania and depression?**

A. Mania and depression are thought to be caused by a variety of biological factors such as a chemical imbalance (of serotonin, noradrenaline, or dopamine) in the brain. Sometimes there are social and psychological factors which also can contribute to mood disorders.

**Q. How do mood stabilizers work?**

A. How mood stabilizers work exactly is not known. A popular theory is that mood stabilizers may work by restoring the balance of various chemicals within the brain.

**Q. What types of mood stabilizers exist?**

A. Lithium, valproate (sodium valproate or valproate semisodium), carbamazepine, lamotrigine, and olanzapine are the most commonly prescribed mood stabilizers.

**Q. Where can I get more information about mood stabilizers, bipolar affective disorder, and depression?**

A. Your doctor, pharmacist or the following websites:

[www.imb.ie](http://www.imb.ie)

[www.medicines.ie](http://www.medicines.ie)

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

[www.shineonline.ie](http://www.shineonline.ie)

[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

[www.grow.ie](http://www.grow.ie)

In addition, the Patient Information Leaflet that comes with your medication contains important and useful information about the medications you may be taking.