

# Any Lab Test Now

## LITHIUM LEVELS LAB TEST

### **DESCRIPTION**

Lithium is a medication used to treat bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive disorder. The disorder is characterized by wide mood swings with extreme depression including sadness and a lack of energy and interest in normal activities at the low end of the spectrum and mania or extreme euphoria and energy at the high end. Bipolar disorder can be treated with medications such as lithium and psychotherapy (psychological counseling). Mood swings can be as infrequent as a few times a year or as often as several times a day. Without treatment bipolar disorder may get worse causing severe disruption to normal activities like work and social life.

### **WHY DO I NEED THIS TEST?**

Lithium can be extremely helpful in the treatment of bipolar disorder and the ability to carry on normal activities but there are many possible side effects. Common side effects are dry mouth, restlessness, weight gain, cognitive problems, lethargy and digestive issues. These can often be managed by adjusting the dose or dosage schedule. When beginning lithium treatment it will be important for you and your doctor to monitor the levels of lithium in your blood to minimize side effects and to ensure that the level is not toxic.

High levels of lithium can cause severe side effects including tremor, nausea, diarrhea or blurred vision and these symptoms may indicate toxicity. Long term use of lithium can lead to kidney problems so monitoring of lithium levels is critical to your health over time. Extreme toxicity can cause neurotoxicity, delirium, or encephalopathy (swelling of the brain) and needs to be addressed immediately. Lithium is effective in a very narrow therapeutic range and too low a dose may not be effective.

Because of the narrow therapeutic range, ongoing monitoring is very important. Lithium levels should be checked after the initial dosage and then 5 days after any dosage adjustment. Long term monitoring should be done every 3-6 months with stable lithium levels or with any change to the treatment plan.

### **WRITTEN BY:**

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Ekan Essien, MD, MPH, a native Georgian, received his BA from Duke University. Dr. Essien continued his education at Florida A&M University where he received his Masters of Public Health in Epidemiology; received his medical degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee; and obtained training in general and trauma surgery at Grady Memorial Hospital at Morehouse School of Medicine. He is a candidate in the post graduate fellowship in anti-aging and regenerative medicine from the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine.

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