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Review

The Role of Lithium Ions in Psychiatry: A Comprehensive Review

Sneha Lata[1], Suresh Mehta[2] and Khushboo Jain[1]*

[1]Senior Resident, [2]Professor & Head
Department of Psychiatry, Pacific Medical University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, Bharat

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***Corresponding Author Email:** khushboojain03081993@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Lithium, a monovalent cation, has long been recognized as a cornerstone in psychiatric treatment, particularly for mood disorders. Its role in stabilizing mood in bipolar disorder and reducing the risk of suicide is well-documented. Lithium's therapeutic effects are attributed to its ability to modulate several biological processes, including neurotransmitter regulation, neuroprotection, and neuroplasticity. It influences key pathways, such as glycogen synthase kinase-3β (GSK-3β) inhibition, calcium signalling, and the balance of excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmission. Furthermore, lithium has shown potential in mitigating cognitive decline and promoting neurogenesis, making it a candidate for broader applications in psychiatric and neurodegenerative conditions. Despite its efficacy, lithium use is limited by its narrow therapeutic index and potential side effects, necessitating careful monitoring. This article reviews the pharmacological mechanisms, clinical applications, and challenges associated with lithium in psychiatry, emphasizing its enduring significance in mental health management.

KEYWORDS: Lithium, Bipolar disorder (BD), Mood, Psychiatry, Mental health, Pharmacology, Depression

INTRODUCTION

The alkaline group's delicate silver-white metallic element, lithium, has an atomic number of three. It never occurs naturally in a free state but rather as an ion in compounds[1]. When the only electron in the second orbital is lost, lithium becomes a monovalent cation. Six Li and seven Li are its two stable isotopes; the latter is found in nature in greater quantities. This review provides an updated overview of lithium ions in psychiatry, focusing on its mechanisms of action, therapeutic benefits, clinical applications, challenges, and emerging research. It also includes a discussion of recent findings and results, shedding light on lithium's evolving role in psychiatric practice. Its biological relevance stems from the fact that its salts are used to treat mental illnesses. As a mood stabilizer, it is primarily used to treat bipolar affective disorders (BPAD), formerly known as manic depressive psychosis, and to a lesser degree in conjunction with other antidepressants in treatment of major depression. over the years, its usage has expanded beyond mood disorders to potentially include neurodegenerative diseases and treatment-resistant psychiatric conditions.

Clinical Use (Historic)

In the 19th century, uric acid crystals in the urine of gout sufferers were dissolved with lithium. To treat gout, doctors had to give patients large oral doses of lithium salts, but these levels proved to be dangerous[2]. lithium to treat mania separately since it was believed that excessive uric acid levels were linked to many mental illnesses, such as depression and manic disorders[1]. When clinical expertise demonstrated the substantial role of excessive sodium consumption to hypertension and cardiovascular illness, doctors prescribed lithium salts to patients instead of sodium chloride as a table salt. Unexpectedly, this conduct led to serious side effects and deaths among those individuals that used lithium salts. Consequently, the sale of lithium salts was abandoned in 1949[3].

It is well known that uric acid stimulates the adenosine receptors in the neuronal membrane, making it a psychedelic drug. Because of this, Australian psychiatrist John Cade gave rodents injections of lithium salts. Lithium salts, according to Cade, have a tranquilizing effect. Cade then employed lithium salts to manage manic episodes in individuals who were admitted to the hospital on a regular basis[1]. As a result, psychiatrists in the USA, Europe, and other countries realized the therapeutic value of lithium salts in the treatment of BPAD and its potential use as a maintenance medication to avoid relapse.

Mechanisms of Action of Lithium Ions

Lithium exerts its therapeutic effects through multiple complex mechanisms, making it an effective treatment for mood disorders, particularly bipolar disorder. One of the key actions of lithium is its ability to modulate intracellular signalling pathways that affect mood regulation. Studies have shown that lithium inhibits glycogen synthase kinase-3β (GSK-3β), a crucial enzyme involved in neuroplasticity and neuronal survival. By inhibiting this enzyme, lithium promotes neurogenesis and has potential neuroprotective properties, which are especially relevant in the context of mood disorders and neurodegenerative diseases.

Lithium also affects the inositol signalling pathway, where it inhibits inositol monophosphatase (IMPase), ultimately leading to a reduction in inositol and phosphatidylinositol levels. This alteration in signalling pathways results in a mood-stabilizing effect, which is particularly beneficial in preventing the manic and depressive episodes characteristic of bipolar disorder.

Moreover, lithium's effects on neurotrophic factors like Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF) have been documented. BDNF is essential for synaptic plasticity and neuronal survival, which could explain why lithium has been shown to improve cognitive function in patients with mood disorders, further supporting its neuroprotective properties.

Therapeutic Doses of Lithium

Oral tablets containing a carbonate salt of lithium (0.4–2.0 g/day) are administered. Renal function and concurrent drug use are prerequisites for this. Following the use of diuretics, dehydration, and salt depletion, blood levels of lithium increase. The lithium clearance is 0.2 times that of creatinine, hence elderly patients and those with renal impairment should have their dosages modified.

Pharmacokinetics

When lithium is taken orally, it is quickly and entirely absorbed. Since it is a cation, the renal system does not metabolize it and excretes it unaltered. The half-life of lithium is twelve hours. It is completely dispersed throughout the body's interstitial fluid before gradually making its way into the cells (intracellular fluid). After five to seven days, its serum level reaches a steady-state. Acute mania requires greater doses, which fall within the therapeutic range of 0.5–1.0 mmol/l. Levels above this range may have serious negative consequences.

In terms of the maximum lithium serum concentration attained and the degree of drug absorption, the bioavailability of lithium carbonate tablets is bioequivalent to that of lithium carbonate tablets compared to lithium carbonate tablets in citrate syrup[4]. Serum lithium levels must be precisely monitored for following three reasons:

1. To titre the therapeutic dose so that the patient receives appropriately controlled ranges of 0.5 to 1.3 mmol/l.
2. Over time, patients' cumulative readings may rise to greater levels of up to 1.8–2.5 mmol/l. Acute overdose victims have much higher levels, which can range from 3 to 10 mmol/l.
3. Since lithium has a narrow therapeutic/toxic ratio, prescription should be restricted to psychiatrists in centres where equipment to measure and monitor plasma concentration is available. Patients' selection should be done very carefully (with proper correct diagnosis). In the starting phase the dose should be adjusted to yield a plasma concentration of 0.4–1.2 mmol/l.

Side Effects of Lithium

The majority of Lithium's adverse effects depend on dosage. To reduce the possibility of adverse effects, the lowest effective dosage needs to be employed[5]. Fine hand tremor is typically present during the course of treatment[6]. Lithium is a well-known cause of downbeat nystagmus, which may be persistent or may take many months to improve following cessation. Drinking more water can usually help with other minor side effects including headaches and nausea. Since Lithium is an electrolyte, it throws off the interstitial fluid's equilibrium,

which impacts the intracellular compartments. Numerous studies have demonstrated that taking Lithium can result in hypothyroidism; this is the cause of these people's development of clinical depression. Rarely, Lithium therapy can generate hyperthyroidism through an unidentified process[7]. Hypercholesterolemia and weight gain are two additional undesirable metabolic side effects of lithium medication. Lithium medication may have unintended side effects, such as hyperparathyroidism and hypercalcemia[8]. Another endocrine issue linked to Lithium therapy is nephrogenic diabetes insipidus (polyuria), which occurs when lithium competes with the kidney's ADH receptors.

Overdose and Toxicity

Intentional or unintentional consumption of high levels of Lithium overdose and toxicity are typically caused by the accumulation of excessive doses after prolonged chronic medication. Their signs and symptoms include the following:

- GIT includes diarrhoea, vomiting, and nausea
- CNS: Cerebellar damage is the cause of disorientation, lethargy, seizures, and coma [syndrome of irreversible lithium-effected neurotoxicity: (SILENT)]
- Musculoskeletal: twitching of the muscles and coarse tremor
- Kidney: renal failure and polyuria
- Endocrine: hypothyroidism, goitre, and possibly myxedema coma are among the long-term side effects of lithium medication[8]
- When calcium is mobilized from the bones to the circulation by the parathormone, hyperparathyroidism results in hypercalcemia
- Additionally, temporary hyperglycaemia may occur

Serum concentrations greater than 2.5 mmol/l may be lethal; such patients should receive quick medical attention as soon as their Lithium therapy is discontinued. The toxicity may be increased if hyponatremia from the use of diuretics occurs concurrently. This is due to the fact that diuretics like thiazide[9] enhance the proximal tubules' reabsorption of Lithium, raising serum Lithium levels to potentially hazardous levels.

DISCUSSION

According to the current body of research reviewed here, there isn't a drastic medication treatment for bipolar disorder (BD). Actually, the only treatments available to us are palliative ones, which address the disease's symptoms and indicators rather than its underlying cause. When it comes to mental illnesses, the worst-case scenario is that they are inherited, with various genes being crucial to their genesis. Advanced paternal age has been connected to this, suggesting a factor that is consistent with increased new genetic mutation. Usually brought on by causal environmental events, these genetic variables work in concert to prevent the traditional clinical presentation of BD. These include extremely conflictual families and childhood hardship. As mentioned elsewhere in this study, psychiatrists discovered that Lithium can be used to treat BD as a result of an unintentional incident. We have enumerated all current theories, hypotheses, and empirical data pertaining to lithium's biological effects in this review.

It is a truth that during the past ten years, there have been more pharmaceutical medicines accessible to treat BD patients. grew considerably. Some psychiatrists think that using substances other than Lithium to treat BD would be the best option. But we must acknowledge that for many individuals, Lithium remains the most efficient and well-tolerated form of therapy. Therefore, when dealing with BD condition, psychiatrists should keep using this effective therapy method in their toolbox. In this case, Lithium differs from other medications in that it helps normalize the lower brain volume observed in BD patients. Lithium-naïve BD patients often have a volumetric decline in brain size[10]. Anticonvulsants and other antipsychotic medications that have been discussed elsewhere in this study are also helpful auxiliary medications for polypharmacy-based treatment. To put it another way, one form of Lithium salt is typically present in any combination of psychotropic medications. It is important to note that there are a few general strategies that may help prevent or lessen the frequency of depressive episodes, such as maintaining a healthy, balanced diet, exercising regularly and moderately, minimizing stress at work and at home, scheduling adequate sleep, and abstaining from alcohol and illegal drugs (psychedelics, stimulants).

CONCLUSION

Lithium remains a cornerstone in the treatment of psychiatric disorders, particularly bipolar disorder, treatment-resistant depression, and schizophrenia. The growing evidence for its neuroprotective effects and its potential applications in neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's further solidify its therapeutic relevance. However, its narrow therapeutic window and associated side effects, such as renal dysfunction and thyroid problems, present significant challenges.

Emerging research into personalized medicine and genetic profiling may help optimize lithium therapy, reducing side effects and improving its efficacy. Moreover, the development of new formulations or adjunctive treatments could enhance its therapeutic profile while minimizing long-term risks.

Despite its challenges, lithium remains one of the most effective treatments for mood stabilization, and with ongoing research, its role in psychiatry may continue to evolve, offering hope for patients with treatment-resistant or complex psychiatric and neurodegenerative conditions.

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The Role of Zinc in Psychiatry

Khushboo Jain[1], Karmkrit Jain[2], Sneha Lata[1]* and Suresh G. Mehta[3]

[1]Senior Resident, [2]Assistant Professor, [3]Professor & Head
Department of Psychiatry, Pacific Medical University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, Bharat

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Corresponding Author Email: sneha93lata@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Zinc, an essential trace element, plays a critical role in various physiological and biochemical processes, including brain function and mental health. Emerging evidence highlights zinc's involvement in the modulation of neurotransmission, neurogenesis, and synaptic plasticity, which are vital for emotional and cognitive stability. This article explores the multifaceted role of zinc in psychiatry, focusing on its association with major psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Zinc deficiency has been linked to increased vulnerability to these conditions, while supplementation has shown promise as an adjunctive treatment in certain cases. The potential mechanisms include the regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, anti-inflammatory effects, and the modulation of glutamatergic and GABAergic pathways. Despite its therapeutic potential, further research is needed to establish standardized protocols for zinc supplementation and to better understand its interplay with other micronutrients and psychotropic medications. This review underscores the importance of integrating nutritional psychiatry into holistic mental health care strategies.

KEYWORDS: Zinc, Mental health, Psychiatry, Neuroplasticity, Trace elements, Inflammation

Zinc is an essential trace element involved in numerous physiological processes in the body, including enzyme activity, DNA synthesis, and immune function. It is particularly concentrated in the brain, where it plays a pivotal role in neurotransmission, neuronal growth, and neuroplasticity. Increasing research has indicated that zinc also plays a significant role in psychiatric conditions, such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. This review discusses the role of zinc in psychiatry, including its mechanisms of action, its association with mental health disorders, and the potential therapeutic benefits of zinc supplementation.

Zinc and the Brain: Mechanisms of Action

Zinc is involved in several essential functions in the brain. It is crucial for the proper functioning of enzymes and proteins, such as those involved in neurotransmitter synthesis, cellular signaling, and synaptic plasticity. Zinc affects key neurotransmitter systems, including serotonin, dopamine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), all of which are involved in mood regulation, cognition, and behavior.

Neurotransmitter Regulation: Zinc has a direct effect on neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which are

implicated in depression and anxiety. Zinc deficiency can disrupt the synthesis of these neurotransmitters, contributing to mood disorders. For example, zinc influences the activity of serotonin receptors and the release of dopamine, which plays a role in the reward system of the brain, crucial for motivation and emotional responses[1].

Neuroplasticity and Brain- Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF): Zinc promotes the synthesis of BDNF, a protein that supports the survival and growth of neurons. BDNF is essential for neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to adapt to new information and recover from stress or injury. Low levels of BDNF have been observed in individuals with depression and other psychiatric conditions, and zinc supplementation may help restore normal BDNF levels, enhancing neuroplasticity and improving mood regulation[1,2].

Oxidative Stress and Inflammation: Zinc also acts as an antioxidant, protecting the brain from oxidative stress, a process that can damage cells and is linked to several psychiatric conditions. Zinc's anti-inflammatory properties may help reduce neuroinflammation, which is implicated in disorders like depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder[2].

Zinc Deficiency and Psychiatric Disorders

Zinc deficiency has been associated with various psychiatric conditions. Several studies have found that individuals with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mood disorders often have lower zinc levels than healthy controls. Below, we examine the connection between zinc deficiency and common psychiatric disorders:

- Depression: Zinc has long been implicated in depression, with numerous studies suggesting that zinc deficiency may contribute to the pathophysiology of the disorder. Research has shown that individuals with major depressive disorder (MDD) often have significantly lower zinc levels compared to healthy individuals. Zinc's role in regulating serotonin and dopamine, as well as its effects on neuroplasticity and BDNF, could explain its involvement in depression. Zinc supplementation has been shown to enhance the effects of traditional antidepressants and, in some cases, improve depressive symptoms on its own[3].
- Anxiety: Zinc's relationship with anxiety disorders has also been explored. Zinc plays a critical role in regulating the GABAergic system, which is involved in calming neuronal activity. Deficiencies in zinc may impair GABA receptor function, leading to heightened neuronal excitability and anxiety symptoms. Studies have indicated that zinc supplementation may help reduce anxiety symptoms, although the evidence is still emerging and further research is needed to confirm its effectiveness[4].
- Schizophrenia: Schizophrenia is a complex mental health disorder that involves disruptions in cognitive function, perception, and emotion. Zinc deficiency has been linked to schizophrenia, particularly in relation to dopaminergic dysfunction. Zinc modulates the release of dopamine, and abnormalities in this system are thought to contribute to the symptoms of schizophrenia. Some studies have suggested that zinc supplementation may help alleviate certain symptoms, particularly cognitive and negative symptoms, when combined with antipsychotic medication[5].
- Bipolar Disorder: Bipolar disorder is characterized by extreme mood swings, ranging from manic episodes to severe depressive episodes. Zinc may play a role in stabilizing mood and preventing the extremes of this disorder. Zinc supplementation has been shown to help stabilize mood and improve cognitive function in individuals with bipolar disorder, though more clinical trials are needed to better understand its potential therapeutic effects[6].

Zinc Supplementation: A Potential Therapeutic Approach

Given the association between zinc deficiency and various psychiatric disorders, zinc supplementation has been explored as a potential adjunctive therapy in the treatment of these conditions:

- Depression: Zinc supplementation has been shown to improve depressive symptoms in individuals with low serum zinc levels. Studies suggest that zinc may enhance the action of antidepressants, especially selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), by increasing serotonin synthesis and receptor sensitivity[7].
- Anxiety: Zinc supplementation has also been studied for its potential to alleviate anxiety symptoms. While the evidence is still limited, some studies suggest that zinc may reduce anxiety, particularly in individuals with zinc deficiency. It is believed that zinc's modulation of the GABAergic system and its anti-inflammatory effects may contribute to its anxiolytic properties[4].
- Schizophrenia and Cognitive Function: Zinc supplementation in schizophrenia has shown mixed results, but there is evidence suggesting that it may improve cognitive function and reduce the severity of negative symptoms. Zinc, when combined with antipsychotic drugs, may offer an additional benefit, particularly in terms of cognitive enhancement[5].