**Bipolar Disorder Medication**

_This information is for the purpose of understanding the recommendations of a qualified medical professional and should not be used as medical advice. Work carefully with a medical practitioner to understand medications and their purpose._ (CDS 2012)

**Types of Medication for Bipolar Mood Disorder**

A person with bipolar disorder may have other symptoms besides mood swings. They may include anxiety or psychosis. An anti-psychotic drug may be used to stabilize a person in a severe manic state. Medications for anxiety or depression may used. Preventative treatment can be used once mood swings are identified. Lithium salts and anti-convulsant drugs are common mood stabilizers.

**General Purpose of the Medication**

The purpose of mood stabilizers is to prevent bipolar mania or depression. A person may stop taking medication once he or she feels better. But going on and off medication can make things difficult. It can have a negative effect on a person’s body. It can also sometimes be difficult to identify if medication is working.

It can help to have a plan to evaluate the usefulness of medications. It should support the person to make decisions in a careful way. It should include some kind of agreement about which behaviors are signs of the disorder. An example might be spending money excessively or not going to work. Other behaviors that may indicate the start of problems with moods could also be identified. Examples might include sleeping less or frequent yelling. Consider also identifying behaviors that indicate good health and balance. Examples include showering several times a week, returning calls, and paying bills on time.

A good record of what is tried and how well the person does can be very helpful. Success is measured by the presence or absence of the identified behaviors. An honest account of whether medications were taken or not and any side effects is needed. Lifestyle changes and additional therapies should be noted. Then everyone has an objective way to measure and discuss what is going on. It will give a better indication of whether medications are working or not. Caregivers and loved ones can help the person measure the impact of decisions about medications.

**Route**

Medications are generally taken in pill one time or more often per day. They may also be available in liquid form.

**Impact**

It can take several days to a few weeks before these medications take effect. Other treatments may be used short term to manage serve mania or depression. These are often stopped when the moods stabilizers begin working.

**Common Medication Names**

Medications often have a generic name. This is the name of the active chemical in the medication. They also have a trade name. This is the name they are marketed under by a particular company. Medications here are listed alphabetically by their generic name below. A trade name may appear in parenthesis next to it. Some people respond differently to generics than trade formulas. This may be related to sensitivity to a non-active ingredient. Be alert to this if a person has different side effects or other issues when switching between generic and trade formulas.

This list is meant only as a basic review of commonly prescribe medications. It is not meant to include all medications for bipolar mood swings. You may be responsible to support a person with medication in your role as a direct support professional. If so, you must learn about his or her specific medications. You need to know why the medication is being taken. You will need to know about the proper management of the medication. This includes storage, dosages, timing, and routes to administer them. You also need to know what to look for with regard to side effects or serious problems.
Common anti-convulsants used to treat mood swings:

- Lithium carbonate (Eskalith, Lithobid)
- Carbamazepine (Tegretol)
- Divalproex sodium (Valproic Acid, Depakote)
- Lamotrigine (Lamictal)

Less common anti-convulsants used for mood swings:

- Gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Oxcarbazepine (Trileptal)
- Topiramate (Topamax)