Miracle Mineral Protects Your Brain

By Sheila Casey / RCFP

Numerous studies have found that a common mineral heals the brain by stimulating the growth of new brain cells and protecting brain cells from every known neurotoxin. It has been shown to reduce the incidence of violent crime, homicide, suicide, and drug addiction, while preventing the brain shrinkage and memory loss that otherwise occurs naturally with age, as well as helping people with alcoholism, Alzheimer’s disease, depression, Parkinson’s disease, stroke, cluster headaches and traumatic brain injury.

Although occurring naturally in tomatoes and in the water supply in many places, this mineral is rarely found in any vitamin-mineral supplement, and is not even commonly found in brick and mortar health food stores. Its name may surprise you: Lithium.

Most people think of lithium as a drug for crazy people. While high doses of lithium carbonate are used to treat bipolar disorder, and are available only as a prescription, both lithium orotate and lithium aspartate are available cheaply over the counter, in much lower doses, at outlets such as vitacost.com and iherb.com. (Note: We have no financial connection with either outlet.)

According to the controversial, and now deceased German orthomolecular physician Dr. Hans Nieper, the orotate form of lithium is more effectively transported inside cells, making it more effective at lower doses than the prescription form, lithium carbonate.

Lithium has also been shown to be effective at ultra-low doses, such as those found naturally in tap water. A ten year Texas study found that the incidence of rape, homicide, suicide, burglary and drug addiction was significantly lower in
counties where the water supply contained 70-170 micrograms of lithium per liter, compared to counties where there is little or no lithium in the water. A similar study in Japan found that lithium in the water supply significantly reduced the risk of suicide.

Even a very thirsty Texan who drank three liters of water a day (100 ounces) would still be getting only a half a milligram of lithium per day, if they lived in an area where there is 170 mcg. of lithium per liter of water. Compare this to the amount commonly taken by bipolar patients: 900 mg/day of lithium carbonate, which contains 165 mg of elemental lithium. Put another way, the startling results of the Texas study were achieved with doses that were one-third of one percent of the amount taken by bipolar patients.

These highly beneficial effects from low dose lithium have prompted some researchers to call for adding lithium to the water supply in the amounts found naturally in the high lithium Texas counties.

One of these is Jonathan Wright M.D, author, founder of the Tahoma Clinic in Renton, Washington, and a member of the medical advisory board for the non-profit Life Extension Foundation. Dr. Wright first began working with lithium in the 70s, when research at a VA hospital showed that it dramatically reduced recidivism (otherwise known as “falling off the wagon”) among alcoholics. Not only were these vets drinking less, their families reported less anger, aggression and violence in the men, and less moodiness, weepiness and depression in the women. They were also sleeping better, and generally calmer and happier.

Wright later began using low dose lithium with the children of alcoholics, who often have some of the same mood problems afflicting their parents. (A February 2010 article published in the journal Addiction showed that kids with a family history of alcoholism are more likely to crave sweets, suffer from depression, and become alcoholics themselves.)

But Wright didn’t start using low dose lithium himself until 1999, when an article in the British medical journal The Lancet reported the astonishing finding that just four weeks of high-dose lithium therapy caused a three percent increase in brain volume — translating into billions of additional brain cells. These findings turned on its head
the conventional wisdom that we are born with all the brain cells we will ever have, and that brain shrinkage is an unavoidable consequence of aging.

In the past ten years, says Wright, there has been an “avalanche of research” about lithium. In addition to proving definitively that lithium stimulates the brain to grow new cells, it has also been shown to be, Wright says, a “wonderful neuroprotective agent from any type of toxin there is.” This neuro-protective mechanism is so strong that one respected lithium researcher said, according to Wright, that it “verges on malpractice to prescribe any psychotropic medication without lithium to protect the brain.” Psychotropics include antidepressants, anti-anxiety meds, and sleeping pills.

Dr. Wright has even heard, anecdotally, from numerous patients, that when they are taking lithium they don’t get bad hangovers. Lithium protects the brain from the damaging effects of alcohol, reducing the pain the morning after. Wright cautions that one can’t simply pop a tablet of lithium along with a pitcher of margaritas to achieve this effect, one would have to be taking it regularly, prior to a night of overindulgence, to protect brain cells.

Likewise, it has been shown that if the blood supply is suddenly cut off to the brain, such as with a stroke, brain cells suffer much less damage if the stroke victim has been taking lithium. (It does not work to take the lithium after the stroke, when the damage has already occurred.)

Mentioning that a recent medical journal carried a story with the headline “Can lithium prevent Alzheimer’s disease?” Dr. Wright said, “You know when you see a headline like that, that in another ten years you’ll see the same headline without the question mark.” He then enumerated multiple ways in which lithium interferes with the Alzheimer’s disease process.

Although he has no family history of mental illness or alcoholism, Wright has been taking 20 mg/day of elemental lithium (in the orotate form) for over ten years, purely to protect his brain and keep his IQ and memory in tip-top form, for as long as possible, as he ages.

In over 30 years, Wright has encountered only two or three people who have had a
possible reaction to a dose of 20 mg/day or less: they thought it might have caused a slight tremor — which went away when the lithium was discontinued. On the other hand, he’s had dozens of patients report that their benign tremor improved on low dose lithium.

Wright cautions that every patient is different and it is wise to also take fish oil and flax seed oil, if one is taking lithium. These healthy oils are routinely used to treat lithium toxicity in patients who are so severely bipolar that stopping their lithium is not an option, and they add an extra layer of safety for those using over the counter lithium without a doctor’s supervision.

Wright defines low dose lithium as anything up to a maximum of 55 mg of elemental lithium per day, which is the equivalent of a single 300 mg. capsule of prescription lithium carbonate, or 11 tablets of over the counter lithium orotate or aspartate, which typically contain 5 mg. of elemental lithium per tablet. No one, he says, should consider going higher than that without regular blood testing to insure that they are not toxic, and damaging either their kidneys or thyroid gland. Symptoms of lithium toxicity are: tremor in the hands, rising blood pressure, and flu-like symptoms.

Given the many amazing neurological benefits of lithium, why has there been so little it in the press? A search at nytimes.com for “lithium alcoholism” brought up just two relevant articles: from 1973 and 1975. A search for “lithium Alzheimer’s” at both MSNBC and CNN brought up no relevant articles.

Dr. Wright has a theory about this, and it’s not flattering to either science writers, pharmaceutical companies or biosciences academics. The problem begins, he says, with the fact that lithium cannot be patented, so no real money can be made from selling it. Thus, there are no armies of press agents blanketing science writers with press releases touting its eye-popping benefits. And science writers, Dr. Wright says, “do not dig, and they have not been digging into this lithium at all.” If they don’t receive a press release about it, says Wright, science writers are unlikely to find out about new discoveries.

Not only is there no money to be made selling lithium, lithium represents direct competition to drugs that are currently earning many billions of profit for
pharmaceutical companies. The central nervous system (CNS) drug market is expected to increase to $64 billion this year. By comparison, lithium aspartate is available at vitacost.com for less than $6 for a 30 day supply.

I asked Dr. Wright “If everyone were taking low dose lithium, as you are, wouldn’t there be a greatly reduced market for psychotropic drugs, Alzheimer’s drugs, alcoholism drugs?” and he replied:

“Yes. I don’t know when the news about lithium will break through into public awareness. When it does, it will probably be opposed, because there are so many professors who are on the payroll of patent medicine companies. Anybody who comes out and promotes something that is in competition with a product from the patent medicine companies is going to be called crazy and a quack by those on the payroll of those same patent medicine companies.”

The news that lithium is good for our brains raises some compelling questions. Is lithium an essential nutrient for human health that is deficient in our water supply and the soil that grows our food? With so many people now filtering their water or drinking purified bottled water, are we eliminating even trace amounts of lithium from our diets? Lithium is one of the most abundant minerals in the sea, with 50 micrograms in a tablespoon of seawater. Could that be part of the reason why people the world over flock to the sea, and feel so relaxed and calm after a day spent splashing in the waves?

Until these questions are answered, one thing seems clear: your brain has a good friend in lithium.

Sheila Casey is a DC based journalist. Her work has appeared in The Denver Post, Reuters, Chicago Sun-Times, Dissident Voice and Common Dreams.