

Lithium: increased risk of injurious motor vehicle crashes in the elderly

"Elderly people who use lithium may increase by twofold the risk of being involved in an injurious motor vehicle crash while driving", say researchers from Canada.

To examine the association between lithium use in elderly patients and motor vehicle crashes causing injury, the researchers conducted a case-control study using the Universal Quebec Automobile Insurance Agency to identify all 224 734 drivers aged 67–84 years in Quebec at 1 Jun 1990; drivers were followed up until 31 May 1993.

A total of 5579 of the elderly people in the cohort had been drivers in injurious motor vehicle crashes during the follow-up period and the researchers found that current lithium use was higher among these elderly people than among a random sample of 13 300 controls drawn from the cohort (rate ratio [RR] 2.08; 95% CI 1.11–3.90). The researchers also compared use of carbamazepine, a common mood stabiliser with a different mechanism of action to lithium, between cases and controls and found that current carbamazepine use was not associated with injurious motor vehicle crashes (RR 0.83; 95% CI 0.48–1.44).

The researchers say that *"patients who are prescribed lithium must be told about the increased risk of motor vehicle crashes"*.

Etminan M, et al. Use of lithium and the risk of injurious motor vehicle crash in elderly adults: case-control study nested within a cohort. *BMJ* 328: 558-559, 6 Mar 2004

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