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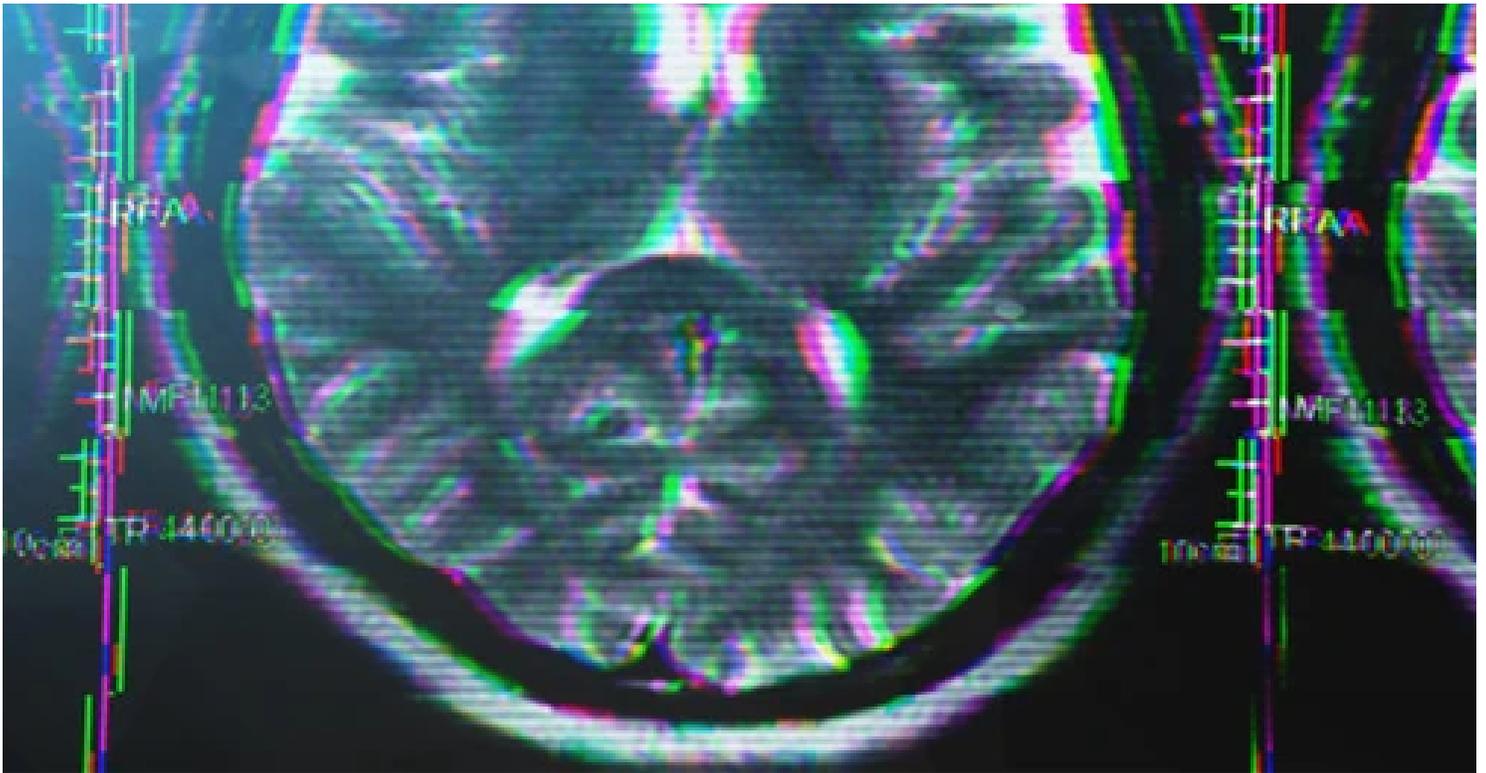
Taking psychedelics while on lithium may increase risk of seizures, bad trips: study

Of the 62 reports involving lithium and psychedelics, 47 per cent reported seizures.

Emma Spears

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Very little research has been completed with respect to the interactions between psychedelics and mood stabilizers. / PHOTO BY DEDMITYAY /iStock/Getty Images Plus

Patients diagnosed with bipolar disorder who are considering psychedelic therapies may want to take stock of their pharmaceutical treatments and consult their psychiatrists before taking the plunge, suggests [a new analysis from researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.](#)

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“Although further research is needed, we provisionally conclude that psychedelic use may pose a significant seizure risk for patients on lithium,” researchers write.



Although some psychedelics (such as psilocybin) may have some efficacy with regard to treating unipolar depression, the researchers note that patients with bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression) have been excluded from trials.

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Unipolar depression is generally treated with antidepressants such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), including Sertraline and Escitalopram, and norepinephrine-dopamine reuptake inhibitors (NDRIs), including Bupropion. However, very little research has been completed with respect to the interactions between psychedelics and mood stabilizers.

In light of recent media coverage regarding the potential of psychedelic therapies to be effective treatments for mental illnesses, some might consider it unsurprising that some bipolar patients have taken it upon themselves to experiment with psychedelics.

An estimated 2.6 per cent of the Canadian population and 2.8 per cent of the U.S. population have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

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Summarized in *Physician's Weekly*, the most recent study analyzed online self-reports (via Reddit, Erowid and Shroomery) of “classic psychedelics” such as LSD and psilocybin administered with mood stabilizers.

Of the 62 reports involving lithium and psychedelics, 47 per cent reported seizures and another 18 per cent cited bad trips. Comparatively, the 34 reports involving lamotrigine and psychedelics reported neither seizures nor bad trips.

In all, 39 per cent of lithium reports involved some kind of medical attention. And 65 per cent of lamotrigine reports “were judged not to affect the psychedelic experience,” versus just eight per cent of lithium reports.

Although the testing pool is small, self-reported and uncontrolled, the authors say psychedelic consumption or therapy “may pose a significant seizure risk” for lithium-taking patients.

In a study published in 2009, lithium was found to be one of the oldest and most commonly used medications to treat bipolar disorder. Reports indicate the mood stabilizer has proved effective at reducing the severity of mania and hypomania, and can be effective at treating bipolar depression in some patients.

Lamotrigine is a mood stabilizer also frequently prescribed to patients with bipolar disorder, particularly for patients experiencing bipolar depression, although it has been reported as being less effective in the treatment of mania. It's also said to be an effective anticonvulsant and is used in the treatment of certain types of seizures.

Suicide rates are 10 to 30 times higher than the general population in patients with bipolar; they also face a heightened risk of death from related attempts, notes a study from 2019. Patients diagnosed with any mental illness are advised to discuss any new treatments or therapies with a trusted medical professional before making any decisions regarding medication.

There is also help available for those experiencing suicidal thoughts.

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