Lithium reduces risk of suicide in people with mood disorders
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The authors say the drug "seems to reduce the risk of death and suicide by more than 60% compared with placebo" and suggest this review "reinforces lithium as an effective agent to reduce the risk of suicide in people with mood disorders."

Mood disorders are a leading cause of global disability. The two main types are unipolar disorder (often called clinical depression) and bipolar disorder (often called manic depression). Both are serious, long term conditions involving extreme mood swings, but people with bipolar depression also experience episodes of mania or hypomania.

People with a mood disorder have a 30 times greater risk of suicide than the general population. Treatment with mood stabilising drugs like lithium, anticonvulsants or antipsychotics can help keep mood within normal limits, but their role in suicide prevention is still uncertain.

So a team of researchers from the universities of Oxford, UK and Verona, Italy set out to assess whether lithium has a specific preventive effect for suicide and self harm in people with unipolar and bipolar mood disorders.

They reviewed and analysed the results of 48 randomised controlled trials involving 6,674 participants. The trials compared lithium with either placebo or active drugs in long term treatment for mood disorders.

Lithium was more effective than placebo in reducing the number of suicides and deaths from any cause, but no clear benefits were seen for lithium compared with placebo in preventing deliberate self harm.

When lithium was compared with each active individual treatment, a statistically significant difference was found only with carbamazepine for deliberate self harm. Overall, lithium tended to be generally better than the other active treatments,