

# Inositol

Inositol occurs naturally in the body as a part of cell membranes. Inositol is present in a variety of foods, particularly beans, grains, nuts, and many fruits. The average adult human consumes about 1 g/day of inositol. People with depression and bipolar have been found to have decreased levels of inositol in their brains.

Inositol is a member of the vitamin B family, specifically vitamin B8. In the brain, it helps cells to grow and develop important receptors that are crucial for healthy brain function. It does this in ways that are similar to lithium, a mineral which is very effective for depression and bipolar disorder.

Several controlled studies have found that inositol improves bipolar depression. There are smaller studies suggesting it may be helpful for fatigue, anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, bulimia and anger. Inositol does not appear to work for non-bipolar depression, though it has not been completely disproven as an option there. Inositol has been compared to medication treatment for bipolar depression and is not as effective as medication. Inositol is often added to psychiatric medications.

## Dosage

Inositol is usually taken as 12 grams/day. You can take the dose all at once or divide it into 2-4 smaller doses. Dosages used in studies ranged from 5-25 grams/day.

## Choosing a product

Inositol is available at most health-food stores and pharmacies, such as [www.drugstore.com](http://www.drugstore.com). Most of the capsules available are 500mg (which is ½ gram; you would need 24 capsules per day!). You can take it easier as a powder form. It may cost around \$1.00-1.50 per day. To evaluate the price: Find the total grams in the bottle and divide by 12; that's how many days the bottle will last you. Then take the total price and divide by the number of days it will last to figure out the cost per day.

I do not have a way to evaluate individual brands. Examples of brands at [drugstore.com](http://drugstore.com) which had the powdered form are: GNC, Jarrow Formulas (best price), Source Naturals, and Country Life.

## Side effects

Inositol is generally well tolerated; possible side effects include mild increases in glucose (blood sugar), flatus, nausea, sleepiness, insomnia, dizziness and headache.

Inositol is not recommended for pregnant women, given the risk of inducing uterine contractions.

## Interactions

Inositol does not appear to interact with other medications.

## Limitations

Inositol has not been widely studied. Its safety is not regulated by the FDA.

*–Updated 7/27/2012 by Chris Aiken, MD*