

PMHNP Board Cheat Sheet: Mood Stabilizers Ranked by Weight Gain

Ranked from **least** to **most** likely to cause weight gain. Use this for quick board-style selection when the patient is concerned about metabolic side effects.

Rank	Medication	Weight Gain	Best For	Not Good For	Board Pearl
1 - Least	Lamotrigine (Lamictal)	Weight neutral / minimal	Bipolar depression; maintenance; prevention of depressive relapse	Acute mania	"Lean Lamotrigine" - best classic mood stabilizer when weight gain is the main concern. Titrate slowly due to rash/SJS risk.
2	Carbamazepine (Tegretol)	Mild	Acute mania; mixed features; maintenance option	Bipolar depression	Watch CBC, liver function, sodium, drug interactions, and serious rash risk.
3	Lithium	Moderate	Acute mania; maintenance; suicide-risk reduction	Not the most weight-friendly option	Gold standard mood stabilizer. Monitor level, kidneys, thyroid, pregnancy risk, and toxicity.
4 - Most	Valproic acid (Depakote)	High	Acute mania; mixed episodes; rapid cycling	Weight/metabolic concerns; pregnancy	High-yield: weight gain, tremor, sedation, hepatotoxicity, thrombocytopenia, pancreatitis, teratogenicity.

Board shortcut: If the patient has bipolar disorder and says, "I am worried about weight gain," think **Lamotrigine** - unless the case is acute mania, because lamotrigine does not treat acute mania well.