

The story of SANTO-Li

By Pehr-Johan Fager

• SPORTDRYCK
• MÅLTIDSDRYCK
• HÄLSODRYCK

SANTO **Li⁺**

The only mineral water in Sweden with elevated levels of lithium. But also calcium, magnesium and bicarbonate.



www.santoli.se

This is how it started

At the end of 2009, I happened to read a scientific article by Hirochika Ohgami and colleagues published in May of that year. It showed that areas in Japan, with more lithium in their drinking water, had lower rates of suicide. I found this interesting, as I had worked with medical diagnostics for many years and knew that lithium was a drug – a drug for mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder – and that it was measured in the blood at regular intervals as too high levels could cause side effects

Anyway, I started looking in the medical database PubMed to see if there were other articles that showed the same thing, i.e. that the levels of lithium found in ordinary drinking water could have some positive effects. These are levels that, when consumed normally, give 100 to 1000 times less lithium than the drug doses, which should mean that they would be completely harmless.

During my research It turned out that there was a person, Professor Gerard Schrauzer from the USA, who had already published an article in 1990 about how the level of lithium in drinking water from various sources in Texas showed the same results as Ohgami. In the study you could also see that the more lithium there was in drinking water, the lower was crime rate, violent crimes, rapes and drug use.

I also found a number of other articles, the first from 1969, where lithium in drinking water and health effects were looked at. It was found that the incidence of death from

heart attack in the 99 largest cities in the US were lower the more lithium there was. No big differences, but still. There were also animal experiments in the 1970s and 1980s that showed behavioral and reproductive disorders in mice and goats where lithium was completely excluded from the diet. Much of that research had been done in what was then East Germany by Professor Manfred Anke and was not so well known here in the West.

Aha, I thought, you simply feel better mentally and physically if you don't have a lithium deficiency, which many probably do have in areas with very little lithium in the drinking water.

The hunt for SANTO-Li

I therefore began looking for different mineral waters that could contain elevated levels of lithium. Because if people started drinking it. Imagine how good they would feel. We might be able to reduce the number of suicides, crime and drug use and a number of physical ailments.

My search led me to Lithia Springs outside Atlanta in the USA. There was a spring there with a relatively high content of lithium. There, at the turn of the last century, there had also been a health resort where all the American presidents of the time went to drink the healthy water.

The spring was still there when I visited it in April of 2011. A new owner was just relaunching the water in half-liter bottles in the USA. The previous owner, and former mayor of Lithia Springs, Gleda James, whom I also met, had sold the

water by mail order around the world in the 1980s under the name "Love water", and according to Gleda simply because you became so friendly and kind when you drank it.

I got a few bottles home with me and tested them for mineral content at a laboratory in Sweden. The 3 mg/L that was stated on the bottle was only 0.3 mg/L according to the lab, and the taste wasn't the best, so I informed the owner of the spring that I was no longer interested. The reason for the lower lithium level and the slightly musty taste was probably a flood the year before that had also affected the spring.

The search now continued, but not in Sweden as we don't have any springs with elevated lithium levels here, only in Central Europe. Finally, I came to Santovka in Slovakia. There I found a mineral water that met all my requirements, and which, just over six months later, became SANTO-Li and was launched at the annual trade fair "Allt för Hälsan" (All for your Health) in November 2011.

Market introduction

The fair was a success as many people thought the water was both tasty and exciting. I had also drawn up a business plan for how the distribution would take place and what marketing activities would be carried out. One of the most important was to sponsor elite athletes, and primarily golfers. I was convinced that the properties of lithium in low doses, together with the other minerals in SANTO-Li such as magnesium, calcium and bicarbonate, would be a great

help for them to a better game. SANTO-Li was in a class of its own on the Swedish market.

Sponsorship

One of the first to try SANTO-Li was one of our great golfers Anders Forsbrand, with 6 victories on the European Tour during the 1980s and 1990s, and who now played on the European Senior Tour. He had not won a professional competition in 17 years when, after drinking SANTO-Li at every competition for three months, won the Scottish Senior Open. He then played so well that he qualified for the Champions Tour in the USA where he had several top 10 finishes in 2013. Another golfer who has drunk SANTO-Li is our previous world star Alexander Björk. During the four years it took to go from the Nordea Tour to the European Tour, he drank SANTO-Li regularly.

There are many more examples. One is our world star in racing Felix Rosenqvist who drank SANTO-Li during the time he drove F3 and won a series of victories. I have also sponsored the bowler Eva Renvall who, after a few months with SANTO-Li, took won 3 golds out of 4 possible in the senior European Championships 2012 in Norrköping and who also won gold in the European Championships in Dublin 2017. I have also sponsored our best BMX cyclist for several years Filip Svanberg and Team LVL in road cycling, where Thomas Nyberg won double SM-Gold in June 2018 and came fourth in the World Championships in Italy in September 2018 – all in class H55.

Not everyone I have sponsored has become world stars, but they have still done well and raised their level. The ones I have sponsored along the way are two golf professionals, one male and one female, who have now ended their active careers, but who still received free deliveries because they appreciated SANTO-Li so much.

No commercial success

Unfortunately, commercial success has not been achieved. I have participated in many fairs and other events where I have given out SANTO-Li for free, advertised in various newspapers – everything from the magazine HÄLSA (HEALTH) to the morning tabloid SVD, and sponsored the Nordea Tour in golf with water for over 20 competitions.

A big problem was that none of the larger distributors to restaurants and shops wanted to include SANTO-Li in their range – there were so many different mineral waters they claimed, and I was an unknown player on the market without the “marketing muscles” like the big brands Loka and Ramlösa. They did not understand how unique SANTO-Li was despite my attempts to explain.

In the end, I finally got it into HKC (now WeMake), which sends goods to health food stores that are not part of any chain. The big chains like Life and Hälsokraft were not interested at a central level. They were also spoiled by the suppliers having to do big marketing campaigns – something I couldn’t afford. However, some golf clubs that I personally supplied started selling the mineral water. And I sold several thousand bottles in Team Sportia’s tent at the

Vätternrundan (a 300k national bicycle event) for a couple of years. I also had a web shop right from the start where sales also started to pick up. Yes, it started to loosen up a bit.

Criticism and setbacks

But I noticed that there were many who looked at SANTO-Li with critical eyes and did what they could to slow down sales. Lithium was a drug for severe mental illnesses, and you shouldn't sell products with that to the public - was the attitude that some had, mainly from people with healthcare connections.

What they didn't understand was that lithium is an element that is found in the soil and all living things. No one seemed to really understand that it was a question of completely different amounts of lithium that you get through water and food, and what you get during drug treatment. And neither did they know that the natural intake of us humans could vary more than 10 times depending on what you ate and drank. No one knew that the WHO had already classified lithium as a possible essential nutrient in a document from 1996.

The first blow

Then the first real blow came in March 2014 when I had signed an agreement to sponsor the Norde Tour in golf. At that time, the national Swedish TV (SVT) broadcast a consumer program named Plus with 10-minute report about SANTO-Li. It had been preceded by several months of

preparatory work with the aim to discrediting the product by ridiculing it and claiming that I used false marketing.

The accusation was of course false as I had been very careful to follow the marketing rules, but what I had done was to report on the website (then available) that there were a number of scientific studies that showed that low levels of lithium has positive effects on health. But what I also wrote on the website was that there are no studies that show that SANTO-Li would have the effects that the studies showed.

Of course, I did it because there was no such study. If not, I would have been breaking the law. And even if there were studies, I would first have to get approval from the European authority EFSA for any health claims. The fact that I was convinced had nothing to do with the matter.

Speaking of SVT and Plus, one of the points I was criticized for was that I showed on Facebook studies where lithium could slow down Alzheimer's. As proof of how wrong I was, they therefore interviewed a professor who claimed that there was no serious research that could show that this was the case. It is pertinent, but of course not mentioned in the program, that this professor was a major owner in a company that developed a treatment for Alzheimer's that was based on a completely different principle. A company that at the time had a turnover of over 10 million USD and which today, January 2026, has a market capitalization of 3 billion USD. This is because it has now got FDA approval. There is now evidence though that it is better than lithium—rather the contrary in a review article from 2024.

Today, there are also several studies that show that lithium in low doses can slow down Alzheimer's and reduce the risk of being affected – but in cell cultures, in mice and some small clinical trials in humans – the first already 2011. However, it does not seem that interesting since it is not possible to patent such a use and thereby make a lot of money.

Scientific studies

Speaking of scientific studies, I have discussed a lot with different people about doing studies on SANTO-Li. Not on Alzheimer's, but on mentally healthy people, but it was too expensive, or the people I talked to backed out for various reasons.

Among other things, I had far-reaching plans for a study that would be sponsored by the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. I wanted to give SANTO-Li to a group of inmates and compare it with other inmates who would get mineral water without lithium. The purpose was to see if those who got SANTO-Li would feel better mentally and that it would be calmer in the departments where they drank it. After several discussions back and forth, they backed out because I didn't have a professor from a university who was behind it.

In any case, I later conducted a small study of my own at a small company with 8 employees. Half of them received a solution with as much lithium as is found in half a bottle of SANTO-Li and half the same solution without lithium. Everyone then had to fill out a questionnaire before and after the study, which included a series of questions about

how they felt mentally. It was a copy of the study published by Professor Schrauzer in 1994; The results were clear. Those who had received lithium felt better after just 3 weeks.

The academic battle

But the academic battle was not over. A professor at KI (Karolinska Institute) who's research team had published 4 different studies between 2001-2016 on pregnant women who lived in the Andes, in areas where there are quite high levels of lithium in the drinking water. The studies showed that there was a mathematical relationship between the level of lithium in the urine (a measure of intake) and markers of thyroid function, birth weight (30 grams lower) and length (1 cm shorter) in newborns whose mothers had ingested the most lithium. And they concluded that that lithium could possibly affect calcium balance without any direct evidence.

It was worth noting that none of the women were sick and neither were any of the children. Everyone was well. Despite this, the first article warned about lithium in drinking water, and the fourth article stated that lithium in drinking water was a potential health risk. There were also three references in the article that were supposed to support this, but the strange thing was that none of the references touched on the possible health risks of lithium. And one did not touch lithium at all, but on the element boron. The study also concluded by a warning about the increasingly common bottled waters with lithium. A clear reference to SANTO-Li

as it was one of the few bottled waters in the world with elevated levels of lithium, and the only one in Sweden.

The big blow

However, the “big blow” came in October 2017 when a reporter from the monthly magazine on environment and nature “Sveriges Natur” called and asked some questions about SANTO-Li and how dangerous lithium was. I then explained that there were no risks in drinking SANTO-Li and commented on the studies that the professor was behind, that they did not show anything of the sort either. I also sent a copy of what I had written about this in the second edition of my book “Lithium the new health mineral”.

To my great surprise, a couple of days later I read in Sveriges Natur that bottled water with lithium could cause birth defects. The professor in question was quoted, but at the end of the article I was allowed to speak and say that what the professor said was not true – but what credibility did I have with a professor of environmental medicine from KI?

The next day came another blow. A full page in Aftonbladet (the biggest Swedish tabloid) with a picture of SANTO-Li and with essentially the same headline and text as in Sveriges Natur. The next day there were also smaller articles in a lot of other Swedish newspapers.

Of course, I was upset and contacted the professor who claimed that she had not said that lithium in drinking water could cause birth defects and that she must have

misunderstood. But the damage was already done, and no denial came despite several contacts with the responsible publisher and the reporter at Sveriges Natur.

I also contacted the Swedish Food Agency to get their opinion, and they did not consider that the levels in SANTO-Li would be harmful, so I could safely continue selling.

How clicking on Google can ruin

If the report in SVT-Plus and the articles in Sveriges Natur and Aftonbladet only had been seen and read when they were broadcast, or when the newspapers were published, there would have been no problem. The big problem is spelled GOOGLE. If you searched for SANTO-Li, the top link was to SVT with the headline; *"Healthy water that promises everything and holds nothing"* was there for several years, and "SANTO-Li can be harmful to health", with a link to Aftonbladet was 2018 number 2 on my computer when I google. It wasn't exactly positive for sales, to put it mildly. The more I advertised, the more people searched for SANTO-Li to find out more, but they often clicked on the SVT-link, and then on the Aftonbladet-link. Who wanted to buy SANTO-Li after that?

The Science of Lithium as a Health Mineral

From 2010 until today, January 2026, for more than 16 years, I have studied the available scientific literature on lithium from water and diet and its effects on health. I will also

continue to do so in the future as my hypothesis that lithium is an essential nutrient that many people are deficient in is constantly being strengthened by new research – you are simply more easily affected by a number of physical diseases and feel worse mentally when you are deficient in lithium.

Already after a few years, I have also found several studies that could explain why this is so at a cell biological level, which has strengthened my conviction. That is why I started writing the book “Lithium the new health mineral” in October 2014 and published it in January 2015. Perhaps a little rushed, but it contained a lot of interesting information and was the first book in the world to address this.

Since the first small issue of the first book was outsold in a year and much more information about lithium had emerged, I started to write the second edition after the summer of 2016. It was an expanded edition with four new chapters. The book was then launched at the “Allt för Hälsan” trade fair in November 2016, the same trade fair where SANTO-Li was introduced 6 years earlier.

I have been to “Allt för Hälsan” with SANTO-Li four times and given lectures there in two of the years, in addition to offering the mineral water to the visitors. In total, there have probably been upwards of 15,000 bottles over the years.

Final words

Late 2017 I gave up on marketing SANTO-Li. It simply costs too much in terms of time, energy and money to fight the

windmills – the establishment and established large companies. Very sad as I know that there are many who have drunk it for a long time and appreciate it very much. My late mother drank it for almost 10 years, since she had a stock that lasted until 2020, when she was 95 years of age. She died three years later. After a rapid mental decline following two shots of mRNA-vaccine forced upon her 2021.

Despite all this I visited the factory in Slovakia in late September this year. I also brought back home 100 bottles of the tasty and healthy water.

I haven't finished researching lithium and its health benefits and have now a huge material of interesting new articles I have read. My third book is now “work in progress”. I am convinced that Lithium will be recognized as an important nutrient in the future by school medicine, but the only question is when. Today, they still only see lithium as a drug in high doses, and that careful monitoring is needed not to give negative side effects.

The breakthrough for lithium as a health mineral might be to prevent Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. Despite new drugs with monoclonal antibodies available a body of evidence emerge that just a dietary supplement of lithium will be a part of preventing the progress of the disease. But before this happened, more and bigger RCT studies is needed.

Although this may have been experienced as a long text, but there is much more to tell about how a small one-man company like AreBe Group, with a wide range of different

commercial services, tried to bring a completely new unique mineral water to the Swedish market without success. And you never know but, perhaps there will be lithiated water on the market soon, and other products that will deliver necessary addition to avoid lithium deficiency.

In conclusion, I can still say that I do not regret trying. I have met many new interesting people and learned a lot. Then there have also been many nice moments, such as following those I sponsored on site or via TV, or reading about them in the results lists. But the most important and the best thing during the 7 years has been when those who have drunk SANTO-Li told me how much better they feel.

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Bonus material

- Among other things, I have not told you anything about how I sponsored the 2012 World Synchronized Figure Skating Championships and sold more than 1000 bottles in three days.
- Not to mention the adventure in the USA for a couple of years with the company Santoli LLC, and the European team that won the Ryder Cup in 2012 at Medina in the USA. SANTO-Li was delivered to the locker room for to players to drink because of the friendship between Anders Forsbrand and the European captain José María Olazábal.
- The promising cross-country skier Petter Engdahl, with no formal merits, drank SANTO-Li for a few months from March 2016. At the final Swedish Championship competition on April 3, 2016, he came second to Marcus Hellner (twice Olympic gold winner and World Champion) in the “Dundret Hill Climb”. This is Petter’s most meritorious placing in his career. A few years later he gave up cross-country skiing. Why did he stop drinking SANTO-Li? According to him, he didn’t think it had any effect, and it was imported into plastic bottles. Unfortunately, you must import the water to Sweden as it is only available in Slovakia, but plastic was a clear advantage as it was included in the deposit system and is significantly lighter than glass. I can’t believe it had no effect on him, but it is of course up to him to judge.
- One of the biggest names in women’s golf, Louise Suggs (Sep 7, 1923 – Aug 7, 2015), grew up at Lithia Springs.

She was one of the founders of the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) and is in the golf Hall of Fame. After a successful amateur career, she won 55 professional tournaments, including 11 majors. Her father bought the area around the spring in the 1920s and built a 9-hole golf course there. Growing up, she played a lot on the course and drank a lot of lithium-containing water. Gleda James invited Louise Suggs to celebrate her 87th birthday at the spring in 2010. When she turned 90 in 2013, an interview was conducted with Louise, in which she spoke in great detail and vividly about her best golf memories.



Some of the athletes that were drinking SANTO-Li