

# Coumadin

**Warfarin (Coumadin)** belongs to a group of drugs known as anticoagulants.

Although they are sometimes referred to as "blood thinners," anticoagulants don't actually thin the blood. Instead, they lengthen the time it takes for a blood clot to form. This makes it harder for clots to develop in your blood vessels, and keeps existing clots from becoming bigger.

## Why do I need to take this medication?

If a clot forms in or travels to your heart, lungs, or brain, it can block the flow of blood to and from these vital organs. Warfarin has been prescribed for you because you have a condition that increases your chances of developing a harmful clot

## What is an INR test?

A sample of your blood is tested to see how many seconds it takes for a clot to form. Your INR will be tested frequently when you first start taking warfarin while your body is getting used to the medication, and then at regular intervals for the duration of treatment. This is necessary because many factors can change the way your body responds to warfarin over time, including diet, illness, or other medications. If your INR changes, the dosage of warfarin will need to be adjusted. Without that adjustment, the medication either might not be effective or could lead to serious complications.

## What kind of complications?

The most serious potential side effect of warfarin is bleeding. To deal with this

possibility, become familiar with these warning signs:

- Prolonged bleeding from a minor injury such as a cut, or excessive
- Unexplained bleeding from your gums or nose
- Excessive or prolonged menstrual or vaginal bleeding
- Excessive or unexplained bruising
- Red or rust-colored urine
- Black stools, or blood in the stools
- Tiny, round, reddish or purplish spots on your skin
- Pain in the chest, abdomen, pelvis, or lower back
- Unexplained swelling
- Dizziness or faintness
- Severe or prolonged headache

Notify us immediately if you develop any of these symptoms--no matter, how slight, so that you can be given an antidote to stop the bleeding, if necessary.

## How can I reduce my risk of bleeding?

Because it takes longer for your blood to clot when you're on warfarin, it will be harder to stop the flow of blood if you hurt yourself. So you'll need to take some precautions to avoid injury. For example, do not take part in activities that pose a risk of injury, such as skiing, football, or other contact sports.

Shave with an electric razor instead of a blade. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush and floss gently with dental floss. Also protect against injury by wearing gloves when you're gardening and wearing shoes indoors and outside. Put non-slip mats in the bathtub and shower. Arrange your furniture and area rugs to reduce the chances that you'll get injured or trip.

If you do sustain an injury or fall, inform us immediately. Let us know, too, if you have prolonged diarrhea or high fever. These conditions make you more vulnerable to warfarin's effects, and could increase the risk of bleeding. Slight

adjustments in dosage may be necessary to prevent this. Also, stay on a steady, well-balanced diet.

Because vitamin K affects how your body reacts to warfarin, don't significantly increase or decrease your consumption of foods rich in this vitamin, such as broccoli, cabbage, asparagus, lettuce, spinach, turnip greens, kale, liver, coffee, and green tea.

## Does warfarin have any other side effects besides bleeding?

On rare occasions, it can cause serious damage to skin tissue. If an area of skin becomes painful, is surrounded by redness, or appears purple-black, report it to us right away. Other side effects are more uncommon and usually go away as your body adjusts to the medication.

A rash, itching, or shortness of breath, however, may be signs of an allergic reaction, and might mean you should be taken off the medication. Notify us at once if any of these signs appear.

## Is it all right to take other medications with warfarin?

Not without first checking with us. Many commonly used drugs, such as aspirin, antacids, laxatives and antihistamines can interfere with warfarin. So can vitamin supplements. In most cases, you'll be able to take the other medication, but you'll need to have your INR checked more frequently to see if your dosage of warfarin needs to be changed. Try to avoid these drugs: steroids, Tagamet, Biaxin, Septra, Flagyl and Erythromycin.

The same applies whenever you stop taking medication, so notify us either way. Tell your dentist, any new doctor,

pharmacists, and other health care workers that you are taking warfarin. It's also a good idea to wear a Medic Alert necklace or bracelet and carry an identification card with your doctor's name and telephone number, as well as the dose of warfarin you're taking.

## What about smoking or alcohol?

Both tobacco and alcohol change the way your body responds to warfarin and can increase your risk of hemorrhage. If you must smoke, keep your intake consistent. Your use of alcohol should also remain moderate, avoid drinking binges.

## Is it safe to take warfarin during pregnancy?

Warfarin can cause severe birth defects. Women who need this medicine need to be switched to shots of heparin or enoxaparin for the pregnancy.

## How do I take this medication?

Warfarin must be taken in the exact dosage prescribed. If you take too much of the drug, bleeding may result; if you take too little, you won't be protected against blood clots.



Take warfarin at the same time each day to keep the level of the medication in your blood consistent. If you forget a dose you can take it later, as long as you remember to do so within eighteen hours of the time you normally take the medication. You can take warfarin with any beverage. You can crush the tablets if they're easier to swallow that way and then mask the taste of the particles with a flavored drink like juice. Store the medication in a tight container in a cool, dry place.