

Warfarin (Coumadin)

What is warfarin?

Warfarin (Coumadin) is an anticoagulant (blood thinner) that will slow down blood clotting to prevent harmful blood clots from developing or worsening.

Warfarin is sometimes called a ‘blood thinner’. It does not actually thin your blood. Warfarin causes the blood to take longer to form a clot.

How does warfarin help?

The formation of a clot in the body is a complex process that involves multiple substances called clotting factors

Warfarin decreased the body’s ability to form blood clots by blocking some of these clotting factors. This stops harmful clots from forming and prevents clots from getting larger

How should I take warfarin?

Take only the amount of warfarin prescribed for you. Take your warfarin at the same time every day. We recommend that you take your warfarin in the evening. Warfarin can be taken with or without food, and with other medications.

You will need to have regular blood tests while taking warfarin to measure your INR. The test may be as often as every two days to once per month. This test is required to ensure your warfarin is working safely and effectively. The INR value helps your health care provider adjust the dose of warfarin to the right amount for you.

What is an INR (International Normalized Ratio)?

An INR is a blood test that measures how fast your blood clots. You will have a target INR range depending on the reason you are taking warfarin. Your INR will need to be measured regularly to ensure that you are within the target range.

Measuring your INR is required to ensure your warfarin is working safely and effectively. This test helps your health care provider adjust the warfarin dose to the right amount for you.

What if I miss taking a dose?

Take the dose as soon as you remember. If you are within 6 hours of your next dose, skip the dose that you missed. Take your next dose at the scheduled time.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you miss more than 2 doses, please let your health care provider know. Missing a dose can affect your INR.

Information for: _____

Date started on warfarin: _____

Warfarin dose: _____

Target INR: _____

Reason you are on warfarin: _____

Who should know that I have been prescribed warfarin?

Please inform all your health care providers that you are taking warfarin. This includes all your doctors, nurses, and your dentist.

Why does the INR result change? - think ‘DIME’

D – DIET: Foods containing vitamin K (e.g. leafy green vegetables) can decrease your INR. But, you don’t need to stop eating them. Be consistent and try to eat the same amount each day. *Please also see Diet Guidelines While Taking Warfarin or Coumadin handout.*

Alcohol alters the response to warfarin; it is OK to have 1-2 drinks per day occasionally while taking warfarin. Do not binge drink.

I – Illness: If you get sick with a cold, flu, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, or any other illness, it may affect your INR. Let your health care provider know if you have had stomach problems (vomiting or diarrhea) for more than one day.

M – Medications: Any changes in medications may affect your INR. This includes prescription medicines, over the counter medicines, vitamins and herbal products. . Check with a pharmacist before taking any prescription or non-prescription medications to see if there are any interactions.

Medications containing non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) such as Aspirin, Ibuprofen, or Naproxen may be harmful when taking warfarin as they can increase the risk of bleeding.

E – Error: If you miss a dose, take the dose as soon as you remember. Do NOT take two doses at the same time to make up for a missed dose.

Keep a record of your INR and warfarin. Include date, warfarin dose, any changes in DIME (Diet, Illness, Medications, or Error [missed dose]).

Should I have a medical alert bracelet while on warfarin?

We recommend wearing a medical alert bracelet or necklace, or carrying a card to alert health care providers that you are taking warfarin. You can find information about this at your pharmacy or by searching the internet.

Can I take warfarin while pregnant?

Warfarin is not safe to take at certain times during pregnancy. Different medications are used to prevent your blood from clotting during pregnancy. Discuss with your health care provider if you plan to become pregnant and how to best prevent your blood from clotting during pregnancy.

Common Side Effects

Always tell your health care provider if you have any side effects:

- bruising easily or red spots on your skin
- bleeding from gums when brushing and flossing your teeth
- nose bleeds
- taking a long time to stop bleeding if you have a cut
- feeling tired
- feeling lightheaded
- for women, having heavier than usual menstrual periods

Contact your health care provider right away if side effects do not go away or get worse. Arrange to see a health care provider as soon as possible if you have a serious fall or injury.

Reducing your chance of bleeding

Exercise is important to stay healthy. Please continue to exercise but remember that warfarin treatment will increase your risk of bleeding with injury.

- Wear protective gear (i.e. bicycle helmet)
- Use your common sense and do not engage in dangerous activities.
- Apply pressure X 10 minutes following immunizations and flu shots.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet.

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS CALL 911 OR GO TO YOU NEAREST EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

If your INR gets too high, there is a greater chance you could start bleeding and need to get help.

Signs I am bleeding somewhere:

- bloody or black stools
- pink, red or dark brown urine
- coughing up blood
- vomiting up blood or what looks like coffee grounds
- bleeding from gums or nose that will not stop after applying pressure for 10 minutes.
- bleeding into the whites of the eyes
- painful, blue or purple toes
- swelling of the abdomen or pain in the back that does not go away
- severe headache

If your INR is too low, there is a greater chance you could get a blood clot and need to get help.

Signs I have a blood clot somewhere:

- sudden weakness in one or both of your arms or legs
- changes in your vision
- slurred speech
- dizziness or fainting
- pain or swelling in your lower legs
- prolonged or severe headache
- chest pain
- shortness of breath

Take Away Messages

- Take your warfarin at approximately the same time every day.
- Regular INR blood testing is important to staying safe while on warfarin.
- Keep a record of your dose, INR and any changes in DIME (diet, illness, medications, or error (missed doses)).
- Warfarin will make any source of bleeding worse.
- Contact your health care provider immediately if you become pregnant on warfarin.
- Maintain a healthy exercise routine – and be safe while doing it.

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This material has been reviewed and approved by patients, families and staff.

