

Using Warfarin (Coumadin)

Patient Information Sheet

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Taking Warfarin (Coumadin) safely

When you are taking Warfarin (Coumadin), you will need to take certain steps to stay safe. Too much blood thinner puts you at risk for bleeding. Too little puts you at risk for stroke. Follow these guidelines. Also follow any others that your healthcare provider gives you.

- You will need regular lab testing while taking this medicine (INR).
- Tell your doctor about all medicines you take. This includes over-the-counter medicines, supplements, or herbal remedies. Don't take any medicines (including ones you buy over the counter) that your doctor doesn't know about. Some medicines can interact with Warfarin (Coumadin) and cause serious problems.
- Tell any healthcare provider that you see for care (such as doctors, dentists, chiropractors, home health nurses) that you take Warfarin (Coumadin).
- Carry a medical ID card or wear a medical-alert bracelet that says you take an anticoagulant.
- Before taking aspirin, check with your doctor. Aspirin can significantly increase your risk of bleeding.
- This medicine makes bleeding harder to stop. To protect yourself:
- Don't do any activities that may cause injury. If you fall or are injured, contact your healthcare provider right away. Blood thinners prevent clotting, so you could be bleeding inside without realizing it.
- Use a soft-bristle toothbrush and waxed dental floss. Shave with an electric razor rather than a blade.
- Don't go barefoot. Don't trim corns or calluses yourself.

Warfarin (Coumadin): Other important information

Several precautions are especially important when you are taking warfarin. Always keep these points in mind:

- Be sure to follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking warfarin.
- **Take this medicine at the same time each day, preferably in the evening.** Take it with a full glass of water, with or without food. If you miss a dose, contact your doctor to find out how much to take. Don't take a double dose.
- Warfarin is an effective medicine, but it can be dangerous if not taken correctly. It makes your blood less likely to form clots. If you take too much, it can cause serious internal or external bleeding.
- You will need to have regular monitoring while you are taking warfarin. This includes blood tests to check your international normalized ratio (INR) and prothrombin time (PT). These tests show how quickly your blood clots. You will also have a complete blood count (CBC) once in a while. This looks at your blood and platelet levels. Both of these need to be followed while you're on warfarin. Talk with your healthcare provider about whether you need to visit the clinic every week, or if services are available for monitoring in your home.
- Certain medicines can affect your INR and PT levels. Tell your healthcare provider if there are any changes in your medicines. This includes any over-the-counter medicines, supplements like vitamin K, or herbal remedies.
- Your diet can also affect your INR and PT levels. Because of this, it's important to eat a consistent diet. It is especially important to eat a consistent amount of foods that are high in vitamin K. Talk with your healthcare provider before making any big changes in your diet. See below for more information regarding how diet can affect your INR and PT levels.
- Remember that warfarin increases your risk of bleeding. Be careful not to injure yourself. If you have a significant injury, contact your healthcare provider right away. It's important to alert your provider if you've fallen or hurt yourself, even if you don't break your skin. You could be bleeding inside your body without realizing it.

[Warfarin \(Coumadin\): Monitoring your PT/INR blood levels](#)

You will need to have a blood test called a PT/INR regularly. PT stands for prothrombin. INR stands for international normalized ratio. The PT/INR blood test is

done to make sure you are getting the right dose of this medicine. The PT/INR test tells your healthcare provider how your blood is clotting. Prothrombin time, commonly referred to as pro time or PT, measures the time it takes for blood to clot. International normalized ratio or INR is a way to compare results of the PT tests done at different labs.

Warfarin (Coumadin): Watch what you eat

Vitamin K helps your blood clot, so you have to watch how much you eat of foods that contain vitamin K. These foods can affect the way warfarin works. They don't affect the other non-warfarin blood thinners. Here are some specific tips:

- Try to keep your diet about the same each day. If you change your diet for any reason, such as for illness or to lose weight, tell your doctor.
- Each day, eat the same amount of foods that are high in vitamin K. These include asparagus, avocado, broccoli, cabbage, kale, spinach, and some other leafy green vegetables. Oils, such as soybean, canola, and olive oils, are also high in vitamin K.
- Limit fats to 2 to 4 tablespoons a day.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you should not drink alcohol while you are taking a blood thinner.
- Avoid teas that contain sweet clover, sweet woodruff, or tonka beans. These can affect how your medicine works.
- Talk with your healthcare provider and pharmacist about specific foods or special diets that can affect anticoagulant levels. These include grapefruit juice, cranberries and cranberry juice, fish oil supplements, garlic, ginger, licorice, turmeric, and herbal teas and supplements.

Talk with your healthcare provider if you have concerns about these or other food products and their effects on warfarin.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your provider right away if you have any of these:

- Bleeding that doesn't stop in 10 minutes
- A heavier-than-normal menstrual period or bleeding between periods
- Coughing or throwing up blood
- Bloody diarrhea or bleeding hemorrhoids
- Dark-colored urine or black stools
- Red or black-and-blue marks on the skin that get larger
- Dizziness or fatigue
- Chest pain or trouble breathing

Medicine interactions and anticoagulants

Many medicines interfere with the effect of blood thinners. Before starting these medicines, tell your healthcare provider about any prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal supplements you take. In particular, tell your provider about:

- Chest pain or trouble breathing
- Antibiotics
- Heart medicines
- Cimetidine
- Aspirin or other anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen, naproxen, ketoprofen, or other arthritis medicines
- Medicines for depression, cancer, HIV (protease inhibitors), diabetes, seizures, gout, high cholesterol, or thyroid replacement
- Vitamins containing vitamin K or herbal products such as ginkgo, Co-Q10, garlic, or St. John's wort