

Warfarin (Coumadin)

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a medication that stops blood clots in your body from forming or getting bigger.

Warfarin is sometimes called a 'blood thinner'. It does not actually thin your blood. It just makes you bleed more easily.

Why are you taking warfarin?

People take warfarin for different reasons.

Ask your health care provider to check off the reason why you are taking it.

- Atrial fibrillation
- Heart valve
- You have had a clot
- Other _____

How does warfarin help?

If you have a health problem that increases the chances of you getting a blood clot, warfarin prevents clots from forming.

If you already have a blood clot, warfarin prevents the clot from getting any bigger.

Why do you have get blood tests all the time?

You must have your blood tested regularly while taking warfarin. You must have blood tests often at first. This test helps your health care provider adjust the dose to the right amount for you.

The blood test to check your blood clotting is called International Normalized Ratio (INR).

It is not always easy to keep your INR at the right level because many things affect your blood's clotting.

| When the INR is: | Your health care provider will tell you how much to: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• too low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• increase the dose of warfarin |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• too high | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• decrease the dose of warfarin |

What if you miss taking a dose?

Always let your health care provider know if you miss a dose. Missing a dose can affect your INR results. Not knowing you missed a dose, your health care provider could change your dose more or less than it should be changed.

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed. Take your next dose at the scheduled time.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or health care provider. In British Columbia, you can also call 8-1-1.

Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider

- ✗ Any new medication
- ✗ Alcohol
- ✗ Cough or cold medicines
- ✗ Black licorice
- ✗ Herbal products
- ✗ Chinese medicines
- ✗ Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy

Common Side Effects

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

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bruising easily• Small amounts of bleeding from gums when you brush and floss your teeth• Getting small nose bleeds• Taking a long time to stop bleeding when you have a cut | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red spots on the skin• Feeling tired• Feeling slightly 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.

When to go to Emergency or call 9-1-1

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

Signs you are bleeding somewhere:

- Bloody or black stools ('poo')
- Pink, red, or dark brown urine ('pee')
- Coughing up blood
- Throwing up blood or throwing up what looks like coffee grounds
- Bleeding from the gums, nose, or eyes that will not stop
- 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 you 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

Health Care Provider contact information

To learn more about warfarin go to the HealthLinkBC web site (www.healthlinkbc.ca) or call 8-1-1.

Medication Tips

- ♥ Wear medical alert identification that tells others you are taking warfarin.
- ♥ Always check with your health care provider before you stop taking warfarin. If you stop suddenly, you could have a stroke.
- ♥ Keep active. Regular activity helps circulate your blood and can help prevent clots from forming.
- ♥ Most activities are safe. However, do not take part in any activities where injury is common, such as contact sports.
- ♥ Some medicines can increase your INR and increase the chances of bleeding.
 - While taking warfarin, do not take:
 - ibuprofen
 - herbal products
 - herbal supplements
 - fish oil (Omega 3 fatty acids)
 - If you take vitamin E, do not take any more than 400 units (IU) a day.
 - Always check with your health care provider before taking any other medicines you can buy from the pharmacy without a doctor's prescription.
- ♥ If you become pregnant or wish to get pregnant, you should not be taking warfarin. Talk to your health care provider.
- ♥ To reduce the chances of bleeding:
 - Use a soft toothbrush.
 - Use an electric razor.
- ♥ Alcohol can affect how the warfarin works on your blood.
- ♥ Always tell your health care provider if you are taking any of these medications:
 - aspirin
 - amiodarone
 - digoxin
 - anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve), or Celebrex
 - antibiotics
 - steroids
 - clopidogrel
- ♥ Vitamin K helps your blood clot. While taking warfarin, it is important to keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet the same. If the amount of vitamin K you eat changes from day to day, it can make your INR results go up and down. Remember, if your INR gets too high or too low, the chances of you bleeding or getting a clot increases.

Foods high in vitamin K:

green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, cabbage, Swiss chard, spinach, kale, asparagus, parsley, seaweed, Collards, beet and turnip greens, amaranth leaves, brussel sprouts

If you normally eat any of these foods, eat similar amounts each day.

When you travel:

- ♥ You might need to get an INR blood test before you travel and/or while you are away. Check with your health care provider.
- ♥ To keep your blood circulating when sitting for long periods, make sure you stretch your legs and move your body each hour.

For more details on Vitamin K in food refer to the www.healthlinkBC.ca