
Warfarin (Coumadin®)

FAQ



VA
HEALTH
CARE

Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is also known as Coumadin®. It is in a class of medications known as blood thinners or anticoagulants. An anticoagulant helps lower the chance of blood clots forming in your body. It helps clots from getting bigger, and helps stop new clots from forming.

Why do I need warfarin?

Warfarin is commonly used for the following conditions:

- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or blood clots in veins
- Pulmonary embolism (PE) or blood clots in the lungs
- Abnormal heart rhythm (atrial fibrillation or atrial flutter)
- Artificial heart valves

How do I take warfarin?

- Take the dose as ordered by your provider once a day
- Take it before or after food
- Take the dose at the same time each day. We recommend 5p.m.
- ALWAYS follow the most recent dose from your provider. You must take the EXACT dose that your provider tells you to take.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

It is best to NOT MISS A DOSE.

If you forget to take your warfarin and remember within 8 hours, take the dose.

- If it has been more than 8 hours, skip the dose. DO NOT DOUBLE A DOSE. Take the next scheduled dose as ordered by your provider. No need to make up missed doses.
- If you forget two or more days in a row, call the clinic.
- Tell your provider about any missed doses.

Why do I need my blood tested?

You need to have your blood tested to see how warfarin is working. This is done using a test called INR (International Normalized Ratio). Your warfarin dose is based on the results of your INR test.

- Know your INR goal. For most people on warfarin, your INR goal is between 2.0 and 3.0.
- Some people may have a different INR goal. Your doctor will decide what is best for you.
- A number too low means you are at a higher risk of forming a blood clot.
- A number too high means you are at a higher risk of bleeding.

Remember: On the day of your INR blood test, take your warfarin AFTER your appointment.

How often do I need an INR test?

You may need to have your blood tested every few days when you first start warfarin. The test will be done at least monthly. Many people get tested as often as once a week when they first start on warfarin. This is needed to decide the dose of warfarin to keep a balance between clotting and bleeding. This can be thought of as getting your INR at goal.

Can I take other medicine while taking warfarin?

Other medicines may change how warfarin works. It is important that all of your healthcare providers, such as doctors, pharmacists, and dentists, know that you take warfarin.

Tell your provider about any medicine changes since your last visit. This includes new medicine prescribed by the doctor, over-the-counter drugs, and herbal supplements.

Let the provider know if you stopped taking a medicine or supplement.

Are over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, vitamins or herbal supplements safe to use while taking warfarin?

You should not start taking any over-the-counter medicine, vitamins or herbal supplements without first checking with a pharmacist or other healthcare provider.

Tylenol®(acetaminophen) is usually okay to take, but check with your doctor or pharmacist first.

Any medicine that contains aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen should be avoided unless approved by your doctor.

Talk to your pharmacist or doctor before taking any of the following:

Herbal Products	OTC Medications
Ginkgo Biloba	Advil, Motrin (Ibuprofen)
Ginseng	Aleve (Naproxen)
Green Tea	Aspirin
St. John's Wort	Pepto-Bismol
Garlic	Fish Oil (Omega 3 Fatty Acids)
Ginger	Vitamin A, E, C
Coenzyme Q10	Glucosamine
Turmeric	Prilosec (omeprazole)
Feverfew	Tagamet (cimetidine)
Wintergreen	Kaopectate
	Alka-Seltzer
	Nyquil, Vicks Formula 44

Should I watch my diet while taking warfarin?

Yes! The key to good INR results is to keep the vitamin k in your diet the same.

- Vitamin k is found in many foods, especially green leafy vegetables.
- **You DO NOT need to AVOID foods with vitamin K, BUT** you need to keep the amount you eat the same every week.
- Your INR can go down if you eat MORE foods with vitamin k than usual.
- Your INR can go up if you eat LESS food with vitamin k than usual.

Here is a sample list of foods that have vitamin K:

Medium	High
Broccoli	Spinach
Brussel sprouts	Kale
Liver	Collard greens
Romaine lettuce	Green tea
Green cabbage	Swiss chard
Mustard greens	Canola oil
Turnip greens	Soy bean oil
Endive	Mayonnaise (7 TBSP)
Garbanzo beans	
Lentils	
Parsley	
Watercress	

Tell the provider if you have any changes in your diet. Also tell the provider if you are taking any nutritional supplements like Ensure® or Boost®. These often have vitamin k in them.

Some foods can make your INR go higher. These include:

- Cranberry products
- Grapefruit products
- Black licorice
- Energy drinks

Should I avoid alcohol and street drugs?

It is best to not drink any alcohol if you take warfarin. Drinking alcohol can increase your INR and increase your risk for falls and injuries. This will put you at risk for dangerous bleeding.

- If you choose to drink alcohol, do not drink more than 1 or 2 drinks per day.
- **DO NOT BINGE DRINK.** This can increase your INR and risk for bleeding.

Cocaine, heroin, and other street drugs can increase your risk of bleeding.

What are the side effects of warfarin? What should I do if I have bleeding?

Warfarin can make it easier for you to bruise or bleed. Call your pharmacist or doctor if you have any bleeding.

Minor bleeding includes nose bleeds, small cuts, or small amounts of blood in the urine or stool.

Go to the nearest hospital if you have:

- Severe or long nose bleeds
- Red, dark, or cloudy urine
- Bloody stools or black, tarry stools
- Unexpected large bruises
- Too much bleeding from minor cuts
- Too much menstrual bleeding
- Vomited blood (old blood may look like coffee grounds)
- Cough up large amounts of blood
- Long severe headaches, backaches, or stomach pain

What activities should I avoid while taking warfarin?

You should avoid contact sports or any other activities that put you at a high risk of injury.

It is important to always wear a seat belt while driving.

Be careful at home where most accidents happen.

- Make sure your bathroom is slip proof.
- Use night lights.
- Remove items that may cause you to trip or fall.
- Consider using a soft toothbrush and an electric razor for shaving.
- Avoid walking around barefoot.

These small changes can help prevent bleeding.

What procedures should I tell the provider about?

Tell your provider about all upcoming procedures at least one week in advance. The provider may need to give you directions to stop your warfarin before your procedure.

Tell all of your doctors and dentists that you take warfarin before a procedure is scheduled.

What should I do if I am going on a trip?

Tell us if you have planned a long trip. We may need to have your INR checked at another site while you are away.