



UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
HEART INSTITUTE
INSTITUT DE CARDIOLOGIE
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA

Anticoagulation Medication PATIENT INFORMATION



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Anticoagulation medication reduces blood clotting. It is prescribed for people who are at risk of developing blood clots.

Coumadin® (Warfarin) is the most commonly used tablet anticoagulant. It is a blood thinner that helps blood flow more easily and reduces the risk of developing abnormal blood clots.

Part A: Coumadin® Information

Your Coumadin® (Warfarin) Information

Your doctor has prescribed the blood thinner Coumadin® (also called Warfarin) because you have:

- Atrial fibrillation or flutter (irregular heart beat)
- An artificial heart valve
- Had a large heart attack
- Blood clot(s) in your heart
- A weak heart
- Had a stroke
- Blood clots in your legs or lungs
- Other: _____

Your dose of Coumadin® (Warfarin) is:

The tablet strength prescribed is:

Your Target INR Range is:

Your next INR (blood test) is to be done on:

Your INR will be monitored and followed by:

Taking Anticoagulation Medication Safely

Before filling your Coumadin® (Warfarin) prescription, make your doctor and nurse aware of the following:

- All the medications, herbal supplements, and vitamins you are currently taking—keep an updated list with you at all times
- Any allergies or bad reactions that you have had to food or medications in the past
- Your health and illness history, especially if you have had any problems with bleeding in the past

Before You Start Taking This Medication

Be sure to ask your doctor the following questions:

- How will this medication help me?
- What side effects should I expect and what should I do about them?
- How and when do I take this medication?
- How long will I be on this medication?

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or if you plan to become pregnant.

Why You Need to Have Blood Tests Done

The amount of Coumadin® (Warfarin) each person needs is different. In order to find the best dose of Coumadin® (Warfarin) for you, a blood test called the INR (International Normalized Ratio) will be done. The INR measures how long it takes for your blood to clot.

The goal of Coumadin® (Warfarin) therapy is to keep your INR within a certain target range, as determined by your doctor. If your INR is too high, you are at higher risk for bleeding problems. If it is too low, you may be at risk for developing blood clots.

When you first start taking Coumadin® (Warfarin), expect to have your blood checked as often as two to three times per week.

Based on your results, you may need to change your Coumadin® (Warfarin) dosage.

Once your INR is in the prescribed target range then your Coumadin® (Warfarin) dose will become more regular and your blood testing will be done less often.

While You Are Taking This Medication

Be sure to keep track of:

- Your INR (blood test results)
- The dose of medication you take each day
- The date of your next INR blood test
- Any problems or side effects that you experience
- Any other instructions or other information from your doctor or nurse

How to Take Your Anticoagulant Medication

Take your anticoagulant at the same time every day, as directed by your doctor or nurse. This is important because it makes the medication work more effectively.

If you miss or skip a dose, contact your doctor or clinic. **Do not** take a double dose.

Your Coumadin® (Warfarin) prescription may contain a number of different strength tablets. Become familiar with the colour of each strength that you have been prescribed.

Based on your INR (blood test results), you may have to change your dose of Coumadin® (Warfarin) frequently, especially when you first start taking the medication.

The required dose of Coumadin® (Warfarin) varies greatly among patients. Patients needing a higher dose of Coumadin® (Warfarin) are not at greater risk of side effects than those requiring lower doses.

Important Precautions When Taking Your Anticoagulant

- Stay safe when you are taking this medication:
 - Be careful when using objects (such as sharp objects) that can cause injury or bleeding
 - Call your doctor or go to the hospital immediately if you have any cuts or injuries that will not stop bleeding even after applying constant pressure
- Call your doctor or the clinic when:
 - you start taking a new medication or stop taking one
 - you make any major diet changes or before starting any kind of weight loss plan
 - You have questions about your medications or blood testing
- Go for blood tests as instructed

Side Effects

The most common side effect is slight visible bleeding. You may sometimes notice:

- A small amount of bleeding from your gums while brushing your teeth
- Occasional nosebleeds, especially in winter when the air is dry
- Easy bruising
- Bleeding after a minor cut that stops within a few minutes
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal

How You Can Prevent Side Effects

- Use a soft toothbrush
- If you are sensitive to dry air, use a humidifier in the winter
- Avoid contact sports or activities in which injuries are common
- Eat a regular and nutritious diet and discuss any planned diet changes with your doctor or nurse

If You Have a Minor Cut or Bruise

Treat the injury with basic first aid. If significant bleeding continues for longer than 10 minutes despite applying pressure, call your doctor or go to a hospital emergency room.

Conditions that Require Immediate Medical Attention

- Large amounts of noticeable bleeding
- Red, dark, coffee or cola coloured urine
- Bowel movements that are red or look like tar
- Bleeding from the gums or nose that does not stop quickly, within 10 minutes
- Vomit that is coffee coloured or bright red
- Anything red in colour that you cough up
- A cut that will not stop bleeding within 10 minutes
- A serious fall or hit on the head
- Any unexplained dizziness or weakness

Going to the Dentist

Tell your dentist that you are taking Coumadin[®] (Warfarin) before you go in for your appointment. Your dentist may ask for your most recent INR results or may request that you have a blood test before your appointment.

Usually your dental treatment can go ahead as normal without your anticoagulant dose being stopped or the dose being adjusted.

Can You Take Other Medications When You Are on Coumadin[®] (Warfarin)?

Many people who take Coumadin[®] (Warfarin) take other medications as well, but Coumadin[®] (Warfarin) can change the way some medications work.

When your doctor writes your Coumadin[®] (Warfarin) prescription, it is important that he/she is aware of all the medications that you are taking.

Contact your doctor or the clinic if you start a new medication or stop one of your current medications.

Do You Have to Change Your Diet?

Vitamin K affects the way that blood clots form. It is found in many foods (see list below) and it can affect your INR results.

Foods Rich in Vitamin K:

- Green leafy vegetables (kale, spinach, swiss chard, green leaf or romaine lettuce)
- Parsley
- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Coleslaw
- Brussels sprouts

It is important to eat a healthy and balanced diet. All of these foods are healthy, but eating them in large amounts may lower your INR result. There is no right or wrong amount of vitamin K that you should be taking. It is more important to take in the same amount each day. That way, your INR result will stay consistent.

These foods may be eaten, but not in large quantities:

- Flaxseed
- Garlic
- Cranberry juice
- Mango
- Ginger
- Green tea
- Avocado
- Soy (soy milk, tofu)
- Chamomile tea
- **Avoid** natto (fermented soy), grapefruit, Seville oranges, tangelos and their juices

A Word about Alcohol

Alcohol can affect your anticoagulant dose. Keep your alcohol intake at two drinks or less per day. Avoid binge drinking. It will affect your INR and can result in other serious problems..

Part B

Your doctor has prescribed one of the new Oral Anticoagulants because you have:

- Atrial fibrillation or flutter (irregular heart beat)
- Blood clots in your legs
- Blood clots in your lungs
- Other: _____

You have been prescribed:

- Dabigatran (also called Pradaxa[®])
- Rivaroxaban (also called Xarelto[®])
- Apixaban (also called Eliquis[®])

Your dose is:

The tablet strength prescribed is:

Your medication will be monitored and followed by:

Anticoagulation medication reduces blood clotting. It is prescribed for people who are at risk of developing blood clots.

New Oral Anticoagulation Medications

There are currently three new oral anticoagulant (blood thinner) medications available in Canada. These are:

- Dabigatran (also called Pradaxa[®])
 - Rivaroxaban (also called Xarelto[®])
 - Apixaban (also called Eliquis[®])
- These new medications **cannot** be taken by patients with severe heart valve problems, artificial heart valves, or severe kidney disease
 - Blood work must be done to check your kidney function to determine if you are a candidate
 - These new medications **do not need INR blood work** monitoring or dose changes
 - There are no special dietary restrictions
 - These new medications and Coumadin[®] (Warfarin) are all anticoagulant medications, but they work in different ways. Warfarin blocks many different blood clotting proteins, while the new oral anticoagulants each block a different but specific blood clotting protein.

Dabigatran (Pradaxa[®])

Indications:

- For patients who have been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and are at risk of having a stroke
 - For the prevention of venous thromboembolism (VTE) following knee or hip surgery
- Taken **twice a day**
 - Two strengths of tablets can be ordered: **110 mg or 150 mg**
 - Medication can be taken with food or on an empty stomach

- This medication is contraindicated for patients with severe renal (kidney) impairment. The dose of medication needs to be reduced for patients with moderate kidney impairment. Blood work will need to be done to check kidney function.

Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)

Indications:

- For patients who have been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and are at risk of having a stroke
 - For the treatment of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolus (PE)
 - For the prevention of venous thromboembolism (VTE) following knee or hip surgery
- Taken **once a day**
 - Two strengths of tablets can be ordered: **15 mg or 20 mg**
Medication should be taken with food
 - Cannot be **taken by** patients with significant liver disease; blood work must be done in order to determine if you are a candidate
 - This medication is contraindicated for patients with severe renal (kidney) impairment. The medication should be used cautiously for patients with moderate kidney impairment. Blood work must be done to check kidney function.

Apixaban (Eliquis®)

Indications:

- For patients who have been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and are at risk of having a stroke
 - For the prevention of venous thromboembolism (VTE) following knee or hip surgery
- Taken **twice a day**
 - Two strengths of tablets can be ordered: **2.5 mg or 5 mg**
 - Medication can be taken with food or on an empty stomach
 - Cannot be taken by patients with significant liver disease; blood work must be done in order to determine if you are a candidate

- This medication is contraindicated for patients with severe renal (kidney) impairment. The medication should be used cautiously for patients with moderate kidney impairment. Blood work must be done to check kidney function.

Definitions:

Deep vein thrombosis, or deep venous thrombosis, (DVT) is the formation of a blood clot (thrombus) in a deep vein, most often in the legs.

Pulmonary embolism (PE) is a blockage of the main artery of the lung, or one of its branches, by a substance that has travelled from elsewhere in the body through the bloodstream (embolism). PE most commonly results from deep vein thrombosis (a blood clot in the deep veins of the legs or pelvis) that breaks off and migrates to the lung, a process called venous thromboembolism (VTE).

A **venous thrombosis** is a blood clot (thrombus) that forms within a vein. Venous thromboembolism (abbreviated as VTE or DVT/PE) can refer to DVT and/or PE.

Where to Find More Information

- **University of Ottawa Heart Institute
Anticoagulation Clinic**
www.ottawaheart.ca/patients_family/anticoagulation-clinic.htm
- **Coumadin® Website**
www.coumadin.com/for_consumers.aspx
- **Heart and Stroke Foundation
Anticoagulant Information**
www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3484137/k.2CCE/Heart_disease__Anticoagulants.htm