

## Staying Safe and Healthy While Taking Warfarin

### Q: What are “blood thinners”?

A: This kind of medicine slows down how fast your blood clots and protects you from problems caused by unwanted clots. The blood is not really “thinner”; it just takes more time to clot than usual. Warfarin, which is also known by the brand names Coumadin and Jantoven, comes in pill form. It is the most common prescription blood thinner on the market. This leaflet will tell you more about blood clots and how to take warfarin safely.

### Q: What causes unwanted blood clots?

A: Normal clotting is needed for the body to heal from cuts and other injuries. Too much clotting can block the flow of blood and cause serious damage to different parts of the body.

If an Unwanted Clot Forms Here:	It May Cause This Medical Condition:
Heart	Heart attack (MI)
Brain	Stroke
Lung	Pulmonary embolism (PE)
Legs/Arms	Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

Some people are born with diseases that cause their blood to clot too quickly. Others form clots when they have problems with an irregular heartbeat, have been seriously injured, undergo major surgery, or have damaged or replaced heart valves.

Walking and other exercise helps to keep blood moving and prevents unwanted clots. For some people who cannot get up and move around, doctors may give them blood thinners to help prevent clots until they can get up and move around again.

### Q: Are there other medicines that can affect blood clotting?

A: There are a number of medicines that affect blood clotting:

Aspirin is a common pain killer that also helps prevent unwanted clots. You should speak with your doctor before starting to take aspirin daily. Tell all your doctors, dentists, pharmacists, and caregivers if you use aspirin and how often you are taking it.

Heparin or low molecular weight heparins are other types of blood thinners that are always given by shot. It is sometimes used to thin blood when patients are first starting warfarin.

### Q: When should I take warfarin?

A: You should take warfarin at the same time every day. You should NOT change your dose or skip doses without talking to your doctor or pharmacist.

### Q: What should I do if I miss a dose of warfarin?

A: It is very important to take your warfarin exactly as prescribed. Missing one or more doses can affect your health. Ask your doctor if she or she has specific instructions for missed dose(s) of warfarin.

Never take a double dose to make up for a missed dose.

### Q: How does my doctor know what dose is right for me?

A: Warfarin doses vary from patient to patient, and can vary from day to day. This is because everyone’s body reacts differently. Some foods and drugs can also change how quickly your blood clots while taking warfarin. Your doctor will do frequent blood tests called prothrombin time (PT) and international normalized ratio (INR) to make sure you are on the right dose of warfarin.

### Q: What are Prothrombin Time (PT) and International Normalized Ratio (INR) tests?

A: PT and INR are blood tests that measure how fast your blood clots. They are used to check how well your warfarin is working and help your doctor decide if you need a different dose. The usual target INR range is 2.0-3.0, but it depends on what condition the warfarin is being used to treat. Your doctor will decide what INR value is ideal for you.

### Q: When should I get my INR tested?

A: Your doctor will decide how often the test needs to be done.

- ✓ If your INR is in the target range, it should be checked at least once a month.
- ✓ The test will be done more often if:
  - Your INR is too high or too low
  - You have problems with bleeding

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- You just started taking warfarin
- You start, stop, or change any of your other medicines
- You have major diet changes, or
- You have any health changes or new medical conditions.

### **Q: Is it okay to take other medicines with my warfarin?**

A: Many medicines can affect how well warfarin works. Some will increase the effects of warfarin, making the risk of bleeding higher. Other medicines can decrease the effects of warfarin, increasing the risk of blood clots.

Common prescription drugs known to affect warfarin include antibiotics, anti-fungals, and some heart medicines. You should tell your doctor when you start, stop, or change any medicines, or get samples from other doctors.

### **Q: Can over-the-counter (OTC) products affect warfarin?**

A: Some OTC products, including aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, Advil, Aleve, Motrin and Naproxen, can affect warfarin. Herbal products (e.g., ginseng, ginkgo, glucosamine, and St. John's Wort), certain stomach acid-reducing products, and multivitamins can change how warfarin works. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before starting or stopping any of these products.

### **Q: Do I need to avoid any kind of food while taking warfarin?**

A: The vitamin K that you get from food and multivitamins helps your blood clot, but warfarin does the opposite. Warfarin works against vitamin K to keep the blood from clotting. You can still eat healthy food that contains vitamin K. However, you should try to eat about the same amount of these foods each day. Some drinks like Ensure and Boost contain vitamin K. It is important to discuss your diet and the vitamins you take with the doctor that manages your warfarin.

Foods that are high in vitamin K include:

- ✓ Broccoli
- ✓ Spinach
- ✓ Brussels sprouts
- ✓ Multivitamins

### **Q: What side effects might I get when taking warfarin?**

A: People who are taking warfarin may bleed longer than usual people as warfarin decreases how fast the body can form clots. Keeping your INR in the target range will decrease your risk of bleeding.

Serious bleeding can be dangerous. Call your doctor, the Emergency room, or 911 **if you have:**

- ✓ Vomit that contains blood or looks like coffee grounds.

- ✓ Blood in the stools or what looks like tar.
- ✓ Red or unusually dark urine.
- ✓ Phlegm or sputum that shows blood.

Other symptoms to report right away are:

- ✓ Severe abdominal pain
- ✓ Headaches that are severe or won't go away
- ✓ Confusion or decreased alertness
- ✓ A fall or hit on the head

### **Q: Should I keep a warfarin diary or calendar?**

A: YES. This will help prevent missed doses or taking double doses. Keeping track can be very simple. Just write down the dose and the date you took it. You should also write down any INR results. This will help you and your doctor better manage your warfarin.

### **Q: Can I go to the dentist or have surgery while taking warfarin?**

A: Patients who are taking warfarin can still go to the dentist. It is very important to tell all your doctors and dentists that you take warfarin way having before any procedures. Depending on the situation, your doctor may choose to change how you take your warfarin before and after the procedure.

## Staying Safe and Healthy While Taking Warfarin

### Keep in mind...



I will talk to the doctor that manages my warfarin if I:

- ❖ START, CHANGE, or STOP any medicines or over-the-counter products
- ❖ Experience some bleeding problems, such as:
  - Gums that won't stop bleeding, and
  - Severe bruises or bruises that appear for no reason, or are bigger than 2.5 to 3 inches

The doctor that manages my warfarin is:

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My doctor's phone number is:

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I will seek immediate medical attention from my doctor, the emergency room, or 911 **if I notice:**

Serious bleeding I can see including:

- ❖ Vomit that shows blood or looks like coffee grounds.
- ❖ Blood in stools or very dark and tar-like.
- ❖ Pink, red or unusually dark urine.
- ❖ Phlegm or sputum that shows blood.

Major changes in how I feel, including:

- ❖ Severe abdominal pain.
- ❖ Headaches that are severe or won't go away.
- ❖ Confusion or decreased alertness.
- ❖ Dizziness or lightheadedness.
- ❖ A serious fall or hit my head.

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