

Warfarin – Family Health Team

For patients and families of Toronto Western Family Health Team

Read this booklet to learn:

- Why you are taking warfarin
- What problems (side effects) to watch for
- What blood tests you need to use warfarin safely
- How other medicines and diet can affect warfarin

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pharmacist: _____



Why am I taking warfarin?

You are taking warfarin because an abnormal blood clot has formed in your body or you have a higher chance of forming an abnormal blood clot.

You are taking warfarin to:

- prevent a clot from forming in your heart since you have atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat). It will decrease your chance of having a stroke.
- treat a clot that has formed in your leg. This is also called deep venous thrombosis or DVT.
- treat a clot that has formed in your lungs. This is also called pulmonary embolism or PE.
- prevent a clot from forming on your artificial heart valve. This will
- decrease your chance of having a stroke.
- Other: _____

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is also known as Coumadin®. It's an anticoagulant.

An anticoagulant:

- is sometimes called a blood thinner. This doesn't mean it thins your blood. Warfarin makes your blood less likely to form a clot.
- helps prevent an abnormal blood clot from causing a medical problem. For example, taking warfarin regularly will help prevent stroke or a new blood clot from forming in your legs or lungs.

What problems should I watch for while taking warfarin?

Taking warfarin increases your risk of bleeding. Bleeding can be minor or serious.

Examples of minor bleeding:

- Nose bleeds
- Bleeding gums when you brush your teeth
- Bleeding from small cuts
- Heavier menstrual (period) bleeding
- Mild bruising or tender swelling for no reason

What do I do?

Tell your doctor or pharmacist right away.

Examples of serious bleeding:

- Bowel movements that have red blood or look black
- Urine that has blood
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Warning signs of a stroke:
 - severe headache
 - dizziness
 - weakness
 - problems seeing
 - trouble speaking
- Bleeding that won't stop

What do I do?

Call 911 or tell your doctor right away.

How long do I have to take warfarin?

Many people must take warfarin for the rest of their lives. Others only need it for a short time. **Do NOT stop taking warfarin without speaking with your doctor or pharmacist.**

You will need to take warfarin for: _____

Start date: _____

Stop date: _____

What blood tests do I need while I am taking warfarin?

There is a blood test that will help your health care provider make sure you are taking the right amount of warfarin. The blood test is called the **International Normalized Ratio** or INR. Your health care provider will decide the best range for your INR test.

Your INR result should be between:

- 2 to 3
- 2.5 to 3.5
- Other _____



If your INR is below the range checked above, you are taking too little warfarin. This can increase your chance of an abnormal blood clot.

If your INR is above the range checked above, you are taking too much warfarin. This can increase your risk of bleeding problems.

How often do I need to have the INR blood test?

When you first start taking warfarin, you may need to have the blood test twice a week. Once the INR blood test results are stable, the test can be done less often (for example, once every month).

Who will review my INR results and call me about what to do next?

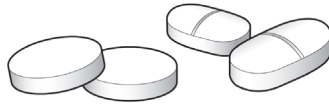
A pharmacist (working with your doctor) will call you with your results. They will tell you if you need to change the dose (amount) of warfarin you are taking. They will also tell you when you need to go for your next blood test.



Can I take other medicines while I am on warfarin?

Yes. But, it's important to tell your pharmacist about any changes to your medicines. This includes changes to:

- prescription medicines
- herbals
- supplements
- over-the-counter medicines you can buy at the pharmacy without a prescription (for example: Tylenol® or acetaminophen)



Changes to your medicines can affect the level of warfarin in your body. We may ask you to have a blood test to check your INR after starting, stopping, or changing a dose of a medicine.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking medicines like Advil® (ibuprofen), Aleve® (naproxen) or Aspirin® (acetylsalicylic acid).

What other things will affect the way warfarin works in my body?

Things such as illness (for example: the flu or a cold), alcohol or diet can affect the way warfarin works in your body. Always tell your health care provider about any changes to your health, activities and habits.

Forgetting to take your warfarin, especially a day or 2 before your scheduled INR test can also affect the results.

Is it safe to drink alcohol?

Don't drink more than 1 to 2 alcoholic drinks a day while you are on warfarin.

1 drink is equal to:



12 ounces
(341 millilitres)
of beer

or



5 ounces
(142 millilitres)
of wine

or



1½ ounces
(43 millilitres)
of liquor

Drinking more than this amount of alcohol can be dangerous, especially if you binge drink. Binge drinking is when you drink 4 to 5 drinks or more in a row. It can cause your INR to go too high and increase your chance of bleeding.

Do I need to avoid foods with vitamin K?

No. Changes in vitamin K levels can affect your INR. But, you don't need to stop eating foods with vitamin K because many of these foods are healthy for you. Examples of foods high in vitamin K include leafy greens like:

- spinach
- kale
- broccoli
- Brussel sprouts
- asparagus

There is no right amount of vitamin K you should eat. Try to eat about the same amount from day to day. Talk to your pharmacist before you make any major changes to your diet.

What if I'm traveling?

Let your pharmacist know about your travel plans before you go. If you are traveling outside of Canada, you may need to plan for another health care provider to follow your blood test results.



Travel tip: Don't put your medicines into checked baggage. They may get lost.

Do I tell other health care professionals that I am taking warfarin?

Yes. Tell all health care providers (for example, your dentist) that you are taking warfarin. Please let the family health team know if another health care provider makes suggestions about your warfarin therapy.

What else do I need to know?

- Don't take warfarin if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.
- Tell your doctor about any falls or injuries that happen after starting warfarin.

Please call us if you have any questions

- Phone: 416 603 5888 (ask to speak to the pharmacist)

My warfarin record:

Patient Name: _____

Doctor: _____

Pharmacist: _____

Phone: 416 603 5888 (ask to speak to the pharmacist)

You are being treated with warfarin to:

- prevent a stroke related to my atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)
- treat a clot that has formed in your leg
- treat a clot that has formed in your lungs
- to prevent a stroke related to my artificial heart valve
- other: _____

Target INR: _____

Start date: _____

How long you will be taking warfarin: _____

This brochure was developed by the Family Health Team at Toronto Western Hospital. It is for your information only and does not replace talking with your pharmacist. Please talk to your pharmacist or other health care professional if you have any questions about this medicine.



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