

Warfarin Therapy Summary

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a medicine given to people who have had a blood clot or are at risk of having a blood clot.

Why do I need to take warfarin?

Common reasons for taking warfarin are an irregular heartbeat (atrial fibrillation), artificial heart valves, and abnormal blood clots in the leg or arm (deep vein thrombosis) or lungs (pulmonary embolism). Warfarin is also used for other conditions. Ask your doctor why you need warfarin.

How should I take warfarin?

Warfarin is taken once a day at the same time every day, with or without food.

If you miss a dose of warfarin, take it as soon as you remember. If you are close to your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue on as normal. Contact your doctor if you miss more than 2 doses in a row. DO NOT double your warfarin dose unless your doctor tells you to.

Warfarin pills come in different strengths. Each strength is a different colour, with the amount of warfarin (in milligrams) printed on the tablet. You should know the strength of your pills and what they look like. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist if your warfarin pills look different.

Why do I need blood tests?

People taking warfarin must have a blood test to measure the amount of time it takes for their blood to clot. This blood test is called an INR or International Normalized Ratio. Your doctor will decide what your INR range should be, and adjust your warfarin dose based on your INR results. The amount of warfarin needed varies from person to person. Blood tests help your doctor know how much warfarin you need to take, and if your warfarin dose needs to be changed. You must continue to have INR blood tests as long as you are taking warfarin.

Are there any side effects of warfarin?

The most common side effect is an increased risk of bleeding. You may bruise easier, or find it takes longer to stop bleeding from a cut or nosebleed. Women may have increased menstrual bleeding.

Call your doctor RIGHT AWAY if you have any of these signs of major bleeding:

- Large bruises or tender swelling for no reason
- Severe headache
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Nose bleeds that last more than 15 to 20 minutes
- Swelling and tenderness or pain in your belly
- Bowel movements that are red or dark black and look like tar
- Red, dark, coffee or cola coloured urine
- Severe back pain for no reason

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You should also contact your doctor as soon as possible if you have:

- Diarrhea or fever and chills for more than 1 to 2 days
- Swelling of feet and lower legs for more than 1 to 2 days, especially if it is painful
- Yellow discolouration of eyes or skin
- Dizziness, trouble breathing, chest pain or feelings of weakness
- Have had a serious fall or hit your head

Can I take other medicines while I am taking warfarin?

Prescription or over-the-counter medicines, herbs, and vitamins may change the way warfarin works. When some medicines are combined with warfarin your risk of bleeding can increase a lot. Do not take aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) unless your doctor tells you to.

Ask if you need extra INR testing every time you start a new medicine. It is very important to ask about INR testing if you need to take an antibiotic for an infection.

Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting or stopping any medicine.

How does my lifestyle affect warfarin therapy?

While you are taking warfarin, you can continue to be active and enjoy the things you love to do, just be extra careful not to fall or cut yourself.

Avoid contact sports as they can be dangerous for people taking warfarin.

You should not change your diet when you start warfarin. Vitamin K containing food will affect your INR so try to keep your diet the same. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian if you have questions about your diet.

Heavy drinking affects how well your body is able to handle warfarin, and might increase your risk of bleeding. Avoid alcohol or limit yourself to 1 to 2 servings of alcohol per day.

Lifestyle changes can affect your INR test results. Talk to your doctor if you are planning to change your diet, start or stop smoking, or change your exercise routine.

What else should I know about warfarin therapy?

It is important to tell all of your health care providers including your dentist that you take warfarin. Wear a bracelet, necklace, or have a wallet card that tells people that you take warfarin and why.

Warfarin should be kept out of the reach of children, and should not be taken if you are pregnant. Contact your doctor right away if you think you are pregnant.

This information is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. Please talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about your warfarin therapy.