



# Warfarin/Coumadin®

## What is Warfarin/Coumadin®?

Warfarin, also called Coumadin® or Jantoven®, helps to prevent blood clots from forming. Blood clots can block a blood vessel and cut off the blood supply to a body part. Rarely, clots can break into pieces and travel in the blood stream, lodging in the heart (causing a heart attack), the lungs (pulmonary embolus), or the brain (stroke).

**Medicines look different: Coumadin® pills (upper row) and generic warfarin (lower row).**

Pink	Lavender	Green	Tan	Blue	Peach	Teal	Yellow	White
1mg	2 mg	2.5mg	3 mg	4 mg	5 mg	6 mg	7.5mg	10mg



## What are my responsibilities as the patient?

- Take your warfarin/Coumadin® as directed and keep your INR appointments as scheduled. You must have your International Normalized Ratio (INR) level checked at least once a month and more often if you are outside of your target range.
- Follow up with your primary physician on a regular basis.

- Tell your dentist and other doctors that you are on warfarin/Coumadin®.
- Maintain regular communication with your Anticoagulation Provider to keep your INR at a safe level.
- **Lab Tests:** You will need to have your blood drawn regularly to measure your INR. Your INR tells us how quickly your blood clots. Your Anticoagulation Provider will adjust your warfarin dose based on your INR results. If your INR is above your target range, you are at greater risk of bleeding. If your INR is below your target range, you are at a greater risk of forming blood clots.

### **What are the dosing instructions?**

How to take your scheduled warfarin dose:

- It is important to take warfarin at about the same time each day, usually in the evening.
- You may take warfarin with or without food.
- You may take warfarin at the same time as most other medications.
- Use a pillbox to help keep track of your doses. Try not to miss a dose of your warfarin.
- If you have **missed a dose**, you may take a missed dose if there are 12 hours or more until your next dose. If there are less than 12 hours until your next dose, skip the missed dose and continue with your warfarin schedule. Do not double the doses!

Be sure to mark the missed dose on your calendar and remember to report it to your Anticoagulation Provider.

### **What other drugs does Warfarin/Coumadin® interact with?**

Warfarin interacts with many other medications (prescription, over-the-counter, herbal products, vitamins, and dietary supplements). **It is extremely important that you contact your Anticoagulation Provider whenever you start or stop any of these.**

## **Do I need to adjust my diet while taking Warfarin/Coumadin®?**

You should eat a normal, healthy diet while taking warfarin. Consistency in your diet is very important.

- **Vitamin K:** Vitamin K is found in many foods, especially dark, green leafy vegetables. You should not avoid these foods; just be consistent and **eat the same amount of vitamin K each week.** (Eating more vitamin K than usual may cause a low INR; eating less vitamin K than usual may cause a high INR.)
- **Alcoholic Beverages:** Drinking excessive alcohol can increase your INR and put you at risk for bleeding. If you choose to drink alcohol, do not exceed 1-2 drinks per day.

Notify your Anticoagulation Provider before making major changes in your diet; before starting a nutritional or dietary supplement such as Boost or Slimfast; if you are unable to eat for several days; or if you have continued diarrhea or vomiting for more than 24 hours.

## **What activities should I avoid?**

Since warfarin increases your risk of bleeding, avoid activities that place you at risk of injury. Physical activities such as walking, jogging, swimming, and gardening are usually safe and may be continued. Notify your Anticoagulation Provider about major changes in your activity level, as these may affect your INR.

## **What should I do if I become ill while taking this medication?**

Acute illness will change your body's response to warfarin. An episode of heart failure, liver disease, fever, flu, infection, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea can cause an increase in your INR. If you have any of the above, contact your physician first, and then let your Anticoagulation Provider know so they can

better manage your warfarin. Call before you start taking any antibiotics or soon after.

### **What are the risks associated with pregnancy?**

Warfarin can cause birth defects. You should NOT take warfarin during the first trimester (3 months) of pregnancy. It is up to your doctor whether you can take warfarin during later stages of pregnancy. **If you think you have become pregnant while taking warfarin, contact your physician and the Anticoagulation Service immediately.**

### **What should I be watching for?**

It is important to watch for signs of bleeding or clotting while taking warfarin.

**Notify your AntiCoagulation Provider if:**

- Any bleeding episode after seeking medical attention for urgent issues
- Any missed warfarin dose
- New or stopped medication such as antibiotics or steroids
- Poor appetite or illness (diarrhea, vomiting) for more than 24 hours
- Increased alcohol use (2 or more drinks above usual within 24 hours)
- Planned procedures or surgeries
- Increased or decreased intake of vitamin K foods by 2-3 servings per week
- Starting or stopping dietary supplements
- Significant changes in activity levels
- Change of lab draw location
- Need for warfarin refills
- Changes in contact information

**Call 911 or go to the Emergency Room if you experience any of the following serious conditions:**

## **Major Bleeding**

- Blood in stool (red or looks like black tar)
- Blood in urine (red or brown colored)
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Uncontrolled bleeding from nose or gums
- Cuts that will not stop bleeding
- Excessive menstrual bleeding
- Extensive bruising

## **Serious fall, or if you hit your head**

### **Signs and Symptoms of a Stroke**

- Dizziness, visual changes, or severe headache
- Numbness or weakness in any limb
- Slurred speech or difficulty speaking

### **Signs and Symptoms of Clots**

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Redness, swelling, heat, or pain in any limb

## **Other serious symptoms or changes**

**Effective communication with your anticoagulation service can help prevent serious adverse events!**

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

©2011 The Regents of the University of Michigan  
Patient Education Handout associated with UMHS Clinical Care Guideline  
CVC Control #297  
Last Revised January 2011