

# Warfarin

## What is warfarin?

**Warfarin** (also called Coumadin® in the past) is a medication which 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, where they are at risk of lodging in the heart (causing a heart attack), the lungs (causing a pulmonary embolus), or the brain (causing a stroke).

## Warfarin pills look different based on their type and medication strength.

You can see the different colors and doses of warfarin in the table and picture below. They may come in different shapes, but the color and dose will be the same.

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



## What other drugs does warfarin interact with?

A **drug interaction** is when taking 2 or more medications together changes a drug's effect on your body in some way. This may include making the drug less effective, or even causing harmful side effects. Warfarin interacts with many other medications (including prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, herbal

products, vitamins, and dietary supplements). **It is extremely important that you contact your anticoagulation provider whenever you start or stop any type of medication or supplement.**

### **What activities should I avoid while I am taking warfarin?**

- Since warfarin increases your risk of bleeding, avoid activities that put you at risk for harm or injury.
- You can continue physical activities such as walking, jogging, swimming, and gardening, which are usually safe.
- Tell your anticoagulation provider about any big changes in your activity level, as these may affect your **international normalized ratio (INR)**. Your INR is a measurement of how quickly your blood clots.

### **What are my responsibilities as a patient taking warfarin?**

- Take your warfarin as directed by your provider.
- Keep your INR lab tests and appointments as scheduled. 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 (change) 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.
  - Sometimes weekly testing is necessary if you are outside of your INR target range.
- Follow up with your primary care provider (PCP) regularly.
- Tell your dentist and other doctors that you are on warfarin.
- Keep in regular contact with your anticoagulation provider to keep your INR at a safe level.

## What are my instructions for taking warfarin?

- 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 you keep track of your doses. Try not to miss a dose of your warfarin.
  - If you miss a dose and there are 12 hours or more until your next regular dose, take the missed dose.
  - If you miss a dose and 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.**

## Do I need to change my diet while taking warfarin?

You should eat a normal, healthy diet while taking warfarin. Consistency in your diet (not having huge changes in your diet) is very important.

- Vitamin K is found in many foods, especially dark green leafy vegetables (like spinach, kale, romaine, broccoli, and brussel sprouts). Eating more vitamin K than usual may cause a low INR, and eating less vitamin K than usual may cause a high INR. Because of this, **you should try to eat the same amount of vitamin K each week.**
- Drinking a lot of alcohol can increase your INR and put you at risk for bleeding. If you choose to drink alcohol, do not drink more than 1-2 drinks per day.
- Talk with your anticoagulation provider before making any big changes in your diet, or before starting a nutritional or dietary supplement such as Boost®, SlimFast®, or Ensure®.

- Talk with your anticoagulation provider if you are unable to eat for several days or if you have diarrhea or vomiting for more than 24 hours.

### **What should I do if I get sick while taking this medication?**

Sickness or 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 these, contact your doctor first, and then contact your anticoagulation provider so they can better manage your warfarin. Call the Anticoagulation Clinic at (734) 998-6944 before you start taking any antibiotics, or as soon as possible after you start taking antibiotics.

### **What are the risks related to warfarin and pregnancy?**

Warfarin can cause birth defects (changes in how a baby's body develops during pregnancy). 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 doctor and the anticoagulation team immediately.**

### **What signs and symptoms do I need to watch for while I'm taking warfarin?**

It is important to watch for signs of bleeding and clotting while you are taking warfarin.

**Call 911 or go to the emergency room (ER) if you experience any of the following serious conditions:**

- **Major bleeding**
  - Blood in your stool (poop) – your stool may be red or look like black tar

- Blood in your urine (pee) – your urine may be red or brown
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Uncontrolled bleeding from your nose or gums
- Cuts that will not stop bleeding
- Large amounts of menstrual bleeding (blood from your period)
- Large amounts of bruising
- **Having a serious fall or hitting your head**
- **Signs and symptoms of a stroke**
  - Dizziness, visual changes (changes in your ability to see), or severe headache
  - Numbness or weakness in any body part
  - Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- **Signs and symptoms of clots**
  - Shortness of breath
  - Chest pain
  - Redness, swelling, heat, or pain in any body part
- **Other serious symptoms or changes**

**Contact your anticoagulation provider if:**

- You have any bleeding episode after you get medical help for any reason
- You miss a dose of warfarin
- You take any new medications, or stop taking any medications (such as antibiotics or steroids)
- You have poor appetite (not wanting to eat or not being able to eat) or illness (diarrhea, vomiting) for more than 24 hours
- You have an increase in alcohol use (you drink more than 2 or more drinks than you usually do within 24 hours)
- You have a planned procedure or surgery
- You increase or decrease the amount of vitamin K foods you're eating by 2-3 servings per week

- You are starting or stopping dietary supplements
- You have any big changes in your activity levels
- You're changing the location of your lab tests
- You need a refill for your warfarin medication
- You have any changes in your contact information

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