

Coumadin - Review for Current Users

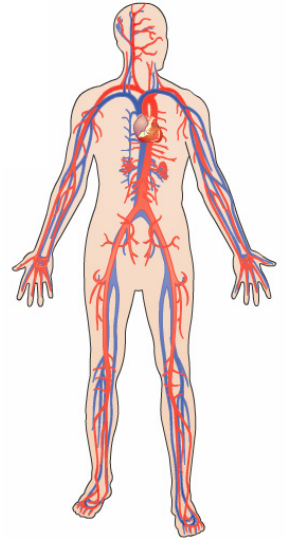
Introduction

Blood clots are frequent in patients who have diseases of the blood vessels or heart. Blood clots may pose a dangerous threat to some people, as they may cause loss of a limb, strokes, and even death.

Doctors prescribe a blood thinner to help prevent harmful blood clots. Coumadin[®], also known as warfarin, is the most frequently used blood-thinning medication. In spite of taking the prescribed amount of Coumadin, illness, diet, exercise, and other medications you are taking may affect how thin your blood is.

If the blood is not thin enough, blood clots inside the blood vessels and heart may form. If, on the other hand, the blood is too thin, you risk a longer bleeding time.

This reference summary will review how to control your protime.

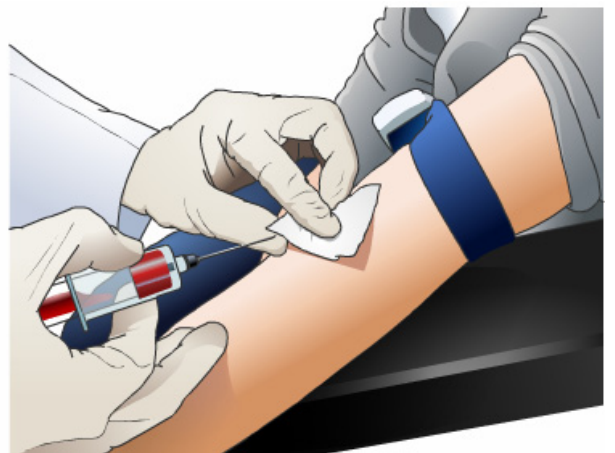


Controlling Your Protime

Some health care providers may use a genetic test to figure out how sensitive you are to Coumadin. But your insurance company may not pay for this test.

Although the prescribed amount of Coumadin should help keep your INR within acceptable limits, illness, diet, exercise, and other medications you are taking may affect how thin your blood is. This is why your doctor will ask you to have your INR number checked regularly.

There are several things you can do to prevent sudden changes in your INR and keep your blood as thin as it should be.



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To keep your blood as thin as it should be you should:

- Take the dosage of Coumadin prescribed by your doctor, always at the same time of the day.
- Keep your eating habits regular.
- Keep your exercise level regular.
- Have your protime checked regularly.
- Check with your pharmacist and doctor before taking ANY new medications, especially over-the-counter medications, antibiotics, vitamins and herbal products.
- Talk with your doctor about products containing aspirin. Avoid aspirin-like products, such as Advil® and Aleve®. For over-the-counter pain relief, discuss acetaminophen as an option with your doctor.
- Inform your doctor of any new or unusual symptoms.



You should follow your doctor's instructions when you take Coumadin. If you miss a dose of Coumadin, do not take an extra pill to "catch up."

Maintaining regular daily activities, including consistent eating and exercise habits, will make it less likely that your doctor will need to change your dosage of Coumadin. Because having too much food rich in Vitamin K in your system may lower your protime, it is important to keep the amount of Vitamin K in your diet steady.

The following foods are high in Vitamin K: beef liver, pork liver, green tea, broccoli, chick peas, kale, green turnips, Brussels sprouts, parsley, and spinach. If you have any questions about any other diet item, check the Coumadin manual or call your physician or pharmacist.

Be extra careful not to vary the amount of green, leafy vegetables you eat. Consume small amounts consistently and avoid V8® products and products containing cranberry, and grapefruit. Green tea can also cause variations in your INR if not consumed consistently.



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Avoid excessive use of alcohol. If you drink alcohol, limit the amount of alcohol you drink to small, regular quantities.

The more similar your activities and exercising habits are every day, the less likely it is that your doctor will change the amount of Coumadin you take. You should also stay away from contact sports where the risk of injury and bleeding is increased.

It is important to have your protime checked regularly. Your doctor will tell you how frequently you should have this blood test performed. Some health care providers may allow you to check your protime at home. Once your doctor receives your test results from the lab, he or she will tell you whether you should increase or decrease the amount of Coumadin you take and by how much.

Patients on Coumadin should ask their pharmacist and physician before starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medications, especially antibiotics. Make sure to tell your healthcare providers, including your dentist, that you are on Coumadin, especially if any type of surgery or injection is contemplated.

As a patient on Coumadin, you should always tell your doctor if you are pregnant or may become pregnant. Coumadin could cause serious malformations in a small percentage of unborn babies when taken during the first trimester of pregnancy. It can also cause excessive bleeding during delivery. If you use knives when preparing food, be extra careful. Razors and hard toothbrushes can cause bleeding; use an electric shaver and a soft toothbrush instead.

It is recommended that patients who are on Coumadin wear a Medical Alert bracelet. This is especially important in cases of medical emergencies when you are unable to communicate with your doctors.



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When to Call Your Doctor

Even if you are taking the prescribed amount of Coumadin, dangerous internal bleeding or blood clots can still happen. It is therefore very important to report to your physician ANY signs of internal bleeding or blood clots. This section discusses when you should call your doctor.

You or one of your family members or friends should call your doctor if you have a serious fall or hit your head, especially if you develop a headache or if you become sleepy or weak. The doctor may want to check that you do not have bleeding within the brain.

If you notice any blood in your urine or stools or if the urine or stools turn very dark, call your doctor. The doctor may want to check that you do not have internal bleeding in your digestive or urinary systems.

If you notice unusual bruising, large areas of bruising, or black and blue marks on your skin for unknown reasons, you should inform your doctor. This may mean that you are bleeding under your skin. Small bruises that result from minor accidents, such as a leg hitting furniture, are normal and do not require an automatic call to the doctor.



Check with your doctor if you experience dizziness, trouble breathing, chest pain, or if you feel weak or more tired than usual. These can be signs of blood loss and anemia. Call your doctor when there is bleeding that does not stop after approximately seven minutes from cuts or from your nose. Call your doctor if you notice more bleeding than usual when you brush or floss your teeth.



Tell your doctor if you notice more bleeding than usual when you get your menstrual period or bleeding between periods. If you have a high fever or an illness that seems to be getting worse, check with your doctor.

You should also check with your doctor if you notice any blood when you cough or vomit, or if you have loose or runny stools (diarrhea), or have an infection with a high fever and chills. If you experience pain or swelling in any of your joints, check with your doctor as you could be bleeding inside the joint.

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Summary

Coumadin helps reduce harmful blood clots in the body. About two million patients in the USA use blood thinners to prevent complications from harmful clots.

Coumadin is a relatively safe medication if you take it properly. Check your protime regularly, keep your eating and exercise habits steady, and communicate with your doctor when needed.

Your doctor, nurse and pharmacist are available to answer any questions you may have about Coumadin and its usage.



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