

Warfarin - Review for Current Users

Introduction

Blood clots can happen in patients who have problems with their blood, blood vessels, or heart. Blood clots may be dangerous. They may lead to the loss of a limb, strokes, or death.

Your health care provider may ask you to take a blood thinner to help prevent harmful blood clots. Warfarin is a blood-thinning medicine. In spite of taking the prescribed amount of warfarin, factors such as illness, diet, exercise, and other medicines may affect how thin the blood is. If your blood is not thin enough, blood clots inside the blood vessels and heart may form. If your blood is too thin, you may be at a higher risk of bleeding.



Controlling Your INR

Your health care provider will take a small amount of blood to check whether the dose is correct. This is called an INR test. You may also hear this test called a protime test, PT test, PT/INR test, or prothrombin time test. INR is the number that tells your health care provider how thin or thick your blood is.

The prescribed amount of warfarin should help keep your INR within the acceptable limits. But things like illness, diet, exercise, and other medicines may affect how thin your blood is. This is why your health care provider will ask you to have your INR 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. To keep your blood as thin as it should be, you should:

- Take the dose of warfarin prescribed by your health care provider at the same time each day.
- Keep your eating habits consistent.

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- Keep your exercise level consistent.
- Have your INR checked regularly.
- Check with your pharmacist and primary health care provider before taking any new medicines, especially over-the-counter medicines, antibiotics, vitamins, and herbal products.
- Talk with your health care provider about products with aspirin. Do not take aspirin-like products, such as ibuprofen (Advil[®]) and naproxen (Aleve[®]). For over-the-counter pain relief, talk with your health care provider about using acetaminophen.
- Tell your health care provider about any new or unusual symptoms.

You should follow your health care provider's instructions when taking warfarin. If you miss a dose of warfarin, do not take an extra pill unless less than 12 hours have passed since you missed the dose. Do not add it to the next day's dose. Keeping regular daily activities the same, such as consistent eating and exercise habits, will make it less likely that your health care provider will need to change your dose of warfarin.



Because patients on warfarin are more likely to have internal bleeding with injuries, you should not play contact sports, such as:

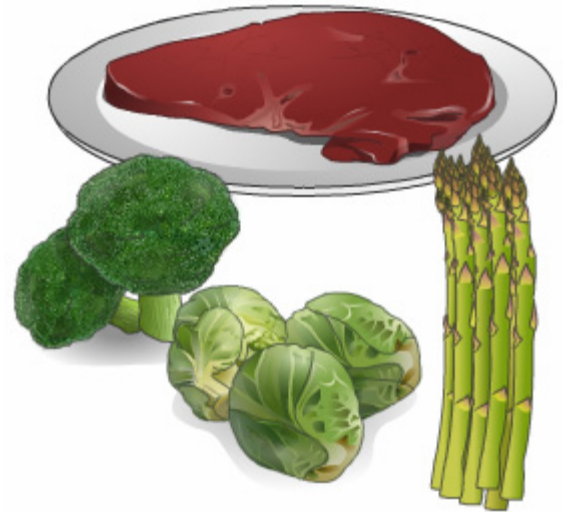
- Boxing
- Football
- Hockey
- Soccer
- Wrestling

Check with your health care provider before you start a new exercise program or sport.

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Because having too much food with Vitamin K in your system may lower your INR, it is important to keep the amount of Vitamin K in your diet steady. Foods high in Vitamin K are:

- Beef or pork liver
- Broccoli
- Kale
- Spinach
- Brussels sprouts
- Asparagus
- Collard and turnip greens

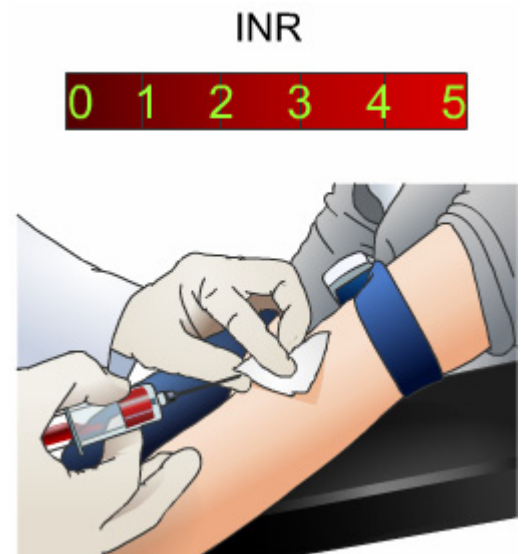


If you have any questions about other foods, check the warfarin manual or call your primary health care provider or pharmacist.

The amount of green and leafy vegetables you eat should not change. You should eat small amounts consistently. If you choose to drink V8[®] products, you should drink them on a regular basis. Grapefruit and cranberry juice should be limited to 8 ounces or less a day. Ask your health care provider if you can drink any alcohol while taking warfarin.

The more similar your activities and exercising habits are each day, the less likely it is that your health care provider will change the amount of warfarin you take.

It is important to have your INR checked regularly. Your health care provider will tell you how often you should have this blood test done. Some people can check their INR at home. Once your health care provider gets your test results from the lab, he or she will tell you whether you should increase or decrease the amount of warfarin you take and by how much.



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Make sure to tell your health care providers, even your dentist, that you are on warfarin. Taking warfarin during pregnancy raises the risk of birth defects in the fetus. It can also cause excessive bleeding during delivery. If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, are pregnant, or want to breastfeed, talk to your health care provider about warfarin therapy.

Be careful when using knives. Razors and hard toothbrushes can cause bleeding. Use an electric shaver and a soft toothbrush instead.

Patients who are on warfarin should wear a Medical Alert charm. This is very important in cases of medical emergencies when you are not able to communicate with your health care providers.



Medical Alert Bracelet

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Certain side effects of warfarin are normal, such as:

- Chills or feeling cold
- Feeling more tired
- Bruising more

If these side effects become severe or do not go away, call your health care provider.

Even if you are taking the prescribed amount of warfarin, dangerous internal bleeding or blood clots can still happen. It is important to tell your health care provider about any signs of internal bleeding or blood clots. This section will teach you about when you should call your health care provider.

You or one of your family members or friends should call your health care provider if you have a serious fall or hit your head. This is very important if you start to have a headache or if you become sleepy or weak.

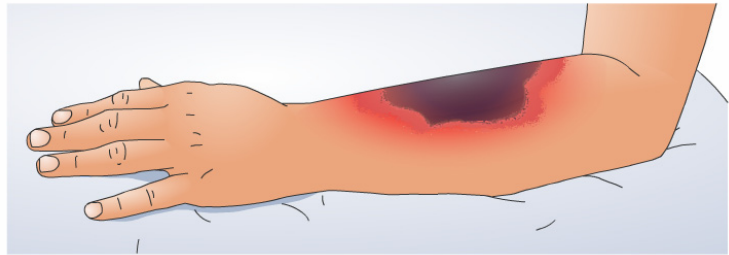
If you notice any blood in your urine (pee) or stools (bowel movement), or if your urine or stools turn very dark, call your health care provider. The health care provider may want to check that you do not have internal bleeding in your digestive or urinary systems.

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



Small Bruise



Large Bruise

Check with your health care provider 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 health care provider when there is bleeding that does not stop from a cut or from your nose. Call your health care provider if the bleeding does not stop after about 7 minutes.

Call your health care provider right away if you experience:

- A rash
- Hoarseness
- Hives
- Itching
- Swallowing problems

Call your health care provider right away if you experience flu-like symptoms, such as:

- Diarrhea (loose stools)
- Nausea (feeling like you need to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)



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Call your health care provider right away if you have:

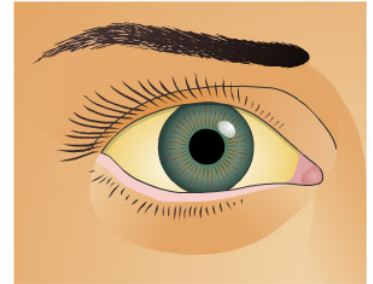
- An infection
- Loss of appetite
- Pain in the upper right side of the stomach
- Yellowish eyes or skin

Call your health care provider if your hands, feet, ankles, or lower legs are swollen.

Tell your health care provider if you notice more bleeding than usual when you get your menstrual period or if you have bleeding between periods.

If you have a high fever or an illness that seems to be getting worse, call your health care provider. You should also call your health care provider if you notice any blood when you cough or vomit, or if you have loose or runny stools (diarrhea), or an infection with high fevers and chills.

If you experience pain or swelling in any of your joints, check with your health care provider. This may be a sign that you have bleeding inside of the joint.



Summary

Health care providers prescribe a blood thinner to help prevent harmful blood clots. Warfarin is a blood-thinning medicine. If your blood is not thin enough, blood clots inside the blood vessels and heart may form. If your blood is too thin, you risk a longer bleeding time.

The prescribed amount of warfarin should help keep your INR within the acceptable limits. But other things like illness, diet, exercise, and other medicines may affect how thin your blood is. For this reason, your health care provider will have your INR checked regularly.

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

- Take the prescribed amount of warfarin at the same time each day.
- Keep your eating and exercise habits regular.
- Have your INR checked regularly.

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If you miss a dose of warfarin, do not take an extra pill unless less than 12 hours have passed since you missed the dose. Do not add it to the next day's dose.

Certain side effects of warfarin are normal, including bruising more easily.

Small bruises that result from minor accidents, such as a leg hitting furniture, are normal and you do not need to call your health care provider. If you see signs of internal bleeding, such as dark urine or stools, call your health care provider right away.



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