



Warfarin Therapy Patient Guide

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This patient guide belongs to: _____

Date warfarin was started: _____

Expected length of therapy: _____

You are being treated with WARFARIN for the following condition(s):

- Atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart beat)
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) (clot in your leg or arm)
- Pulmonary embolism (PE) (clot in your lungs)
- Artificial heart valve
- Heart attack
- Other: _____

Your target INR range (blood test to determine warfarin dose) is:

- 2.0 – 3.0
- 2.5 – 3.5
- Other: _____

Warfarin therapy may be managed by a doctor. It can also be managed by a nurse or pharmacist under the supervision of a doctor.

Name of the person(s) managing your warfarin: _____

Contact information: _____

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is an anticoagulant.

Anticoagulants are sometimes called “blood thinners” but this name is misleading. Warfarin does not really “thin” your blood; it makes your blood less likely to clot.

Warfarin is used to treat and prevent abnormal blood clots.

What does warfarin do?

- prevents clots from forming in your heart or blood vessels
- stops existing blood clots from growing larger
- reduces the risk of blood clots breaking off and traveling to vital organs

Why are blood clots dangerous?

Blood clots in arteries and veins can block normal blood flow and prevent blood and oxygen from reaching important organs and tissues. Blood clots can also travel through the blood stream and block blood vessels in other parts of the body such as the legs, lungs, heart or brain.

Blood clots can cause serious or dangerous problems such as:

- heart attack
- stroke
- deep vein thrombosis or DVT (clot in your leg or arm)
- pulmonary embolism or PE (clot in your lungs)

Why do I need warfarin?

Warfarin is prescribed to people who have had a blood clot, or who are at risk of having a blood clot. Medical problems which increase your risk of abnormal blood clots include atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart beat), some surgical procedures, artificial heart valves, and certain genetic conditions.

If you are not sure why you are taking warfarin ask your doctor at your next visit.

Blood Tests

What type of blood tests do I need?

People taking warfarin must have a blood test to measure the amount of time it takes for their blood to clot. This test is called a prothrombin time. Your prothrombin time is reported as a standard test known as an International Normalized Ratio or **INR**.

You will also need a Complete Blood Count (CBC) test every six months while you are on warfarin.

Why do I need blood tests?

Blood tests help your doctor decide how much warfarin you need to take and when your warfarin dose needs to be changed.

How often do I need to have blood tests?

- When you first start warfarin you may need an INR test every few days.
- If your warfarin dose stays the same, you may need INR tests once or twice a week for a few weeks.
- If your INR stays in your target range and your warfarin dose does not change, blood tests may be done less often.
- Most people need an INR test at least once a month.

IMPORTANT:

INR tests may need to be done more often if:

- your INR is out of range
- you become ill
- you start or stop other medication
- you make changes in your diet or lifestyle

Will my INR test results change each time I have blood work?

INR results may change until the correct warfarin dose is found for you. INR test results may also change due to illness, diet, other medications, physical activity, and lifestyle.

All About Warfarin

Warfarin has many other names:

- Coumadin®
- Mylan-warfarin
- Teva-warfarin
- Apo®-warfarin
- Taro-warfarin
- Sanis-warfarin

What do my pills look like?

Warfarin pills are available in many different doses. Each pill is a different color and has a number printed on it. The number is the tablet strength in milligrams.

Make sure you know what your warfarin pill looks like.

Check your pills every time you get your prescription. If your pill does not look right, do not be afraid to ask your doctor or pharmacist about it – your health is worth it.

How much warfarin do I need?

The amount (or dose) of warfarin you need is based on your INR blood test result, and your INR target range.

The warfarin dose needed to prevent blood clots will vary from person to person. Some people only need a small dose of warfarin to keep INR blood tests in the target range, others people may need a higher dose. It is the INR that is important not the warfarin dose.

INR below target TOO LITTLE WARFARIN May cause blood clot	Target Range	INR above target TOO MUCH WARFARIN May cause bleeding
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What happens if I take too much or too little warfarin?

There is only a small difference between a warfarin dose that is too much and a dose that is too little.

- If you take too much warfarin you are at a higher risk of bleeding.
 - If you take too little warfarin you may develop a blood clot.
- Blood tests help your doctor know which dose is right for you.

How do I know if I am taking the right amount of warfarin?

Your warfarin dose may change from time to time. Always follow your doctor's most recent instructions. Make sure you take the correct dose on the correct day.

Some people use a medication calendar and/or dosette (pill box) to help them remember how much warfarin to take and when to take it.

Missing a single dose of warfarin can change your INR test results. Tell your doctor if you forget any warfarin doses.

Always tell your doctor about any changes in your health, diet, lifestyle, or medicines because your dose of warfarin may need to be adjusted.

How long will I have to take this medicine?

The length of time you take warfarin depends on your medical condition. Some people must take warfarin for the rest of their lives, while others may only need it for a few months.

Do not stop taking your medication unless your doctor tells you.

Warfarin Side Effects

What should I watch for while taking warfarin?

The most common problem for people taking warfarin is an increased risk of bleeding. It is important that you know the signs and symptoms of bleeding.

People over the age of 65 may be more sensitive to the effects of warfarin and may have more bleeding.

Minor bleeding

You may have minor bleeding even when your INR is in your target range. From time to time you may notice:

- bleeding gums when you brush your teeth,
- occasional nose bleeds,
- easy bruising,
- Women may have increased menstrual bleeding (twice your normal flow).

Serious bleeding

Notify your doctor right away or go to your nearest hospital with an emergency department if you have any of the following:

- excessive bruising or tender swelling for no reason
- severe or prolonged headache
- nose bleeds lasting more than 20 minutes
- coughing up blood
- bleeding from cuts that will not stop
- heavy menstrual bleeding that lasts longer than usual
- swelling and tenderness or pain in your abdomen
- vomiting blood
- bowel movements that contain blood or are black
- urine that contains blood
- severe prolonged back pain, for no clear reason

There are other **rare but serious complications** of warfarin therapy.

Contact your doctor immediately if you have:

- yellow discoloration of your eyes or skin
- darkening of the skin in your feet

Tips to Reduce Your Chances of Bleeding:

- use an electric razor instead of a blade to shave
- use a soft toothbrush
- use waxed dental floss and floss your teeth gently
- do not use toothpicks
- place a non-slip bath mat in the tub
- remove throw rugs in your home
- wear shoes or non-skid slippers in the house
- take care trimming your toenails
- do not trim corns or calluses yourself
- be very careful using knives and scissors
- always wear shoes outdoors
- wear gardening gloves when doing yard work
- wear a helmet while bicycling
- avoid blowing your nose forcefully
- avoid contact sports

How to stop a nose bleed:

1. Sit upright and lean forward
2. Pinch the soft lower part of your nose using your thumb and index finger. Hold for 5-10 minutes. Breathe through your mouth.
3. Do not pick or blow your nose or bend down until several hours after the nosebleed has stopped. This will prevent bleeding from starting again.

How does my lifestyle affect warfarin therapy?

Changes to your lifestyle or daily routine can affect your INR test results. This includes:

- big changes in diet like eating more seasonal foods high in vitamin K.
- big changes in exercise routine like starting or stopping exercise.
- quitting or starting smoking.
- changes in the amount of alcohol you drink.
- forgetting to take your warfarin.

Tell your doctor if you are planning to make changes like the ones listed above. Your warfarin dose may need to be adjusted if you make lifestyle changes.

Physical Activities:

Exercise is good for your health. People taking warfarin can continue physical activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, and gardening. You should avoid body contact sports and other activities which often cause injuries. You should wear a helmet when bicycling or in-line skating. It is also a good idea to use eye protection while playing racquet sports.

Talk to your doctor about your physical activities to find out if they are safe to continue.

Dentist:

You should still see your dentist as usual. Most dental treatment can go ahead without any change to your warfarin therapy. Your dentist may need to know your INR to make sure it is safe to provide treatment.

Talk to your dentist about warfarin before your appointment. You may need to have an extra blood test.

Alcohol:

Alcohol may affect warfarin therapy. Avoid or limit alcohol to 1-2 drinks per day. (1 drink = 1 pint of beer, 4 ounces of wine, or 1 ounce of hard liquor)

Tell your doctor how much alcohol you drink. Your warfarin dose may need to be changed if you increase or decrease your alcohol intake.

Diet and vitamin K:

Good nutrition is important for your health. Do not start a “fad” diet or make big changes to your eating habits without talking to your doctor or registered dietitian.

Vitamin K plays a role in the clotting process and changes in vitamin K levels may affect your INR. It is important to keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet the same from day to day. You should not stop eating foods that contain vitamin K.

Foods high in vitamin K:

The following foods are high in vitamin K .Try to eat the same number of servings of foods from this list each day. Some examples are:

- asparagus
- broccoli
- brussels sprouts
- cabbage/ coleslaw
- cucumber with peel
- endive
- green scallion
- lettuce
- mustard greens
- oils – canola, vegetable, or soybean
- parsley
- pistachio nut
- spinach
- turnip greens
- watercress

Should I avoid foods with a lot of vitamin K?

Do not avoid foods high in vitamin K.

There is no “correct” amount of vitamin K that you should have. Try to keep the amount of these foods the same from day to day. For example, if you normally eat about four or five servings of foods high in vitamin K then make this part of your daily eating habits.

You should **avoid** the following foods which are very high in vitamin K:

- green tea
- liver
- dulse

Frequently Asked Questions about Warfarin

What should I do if I forget to take a warfarin pill?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember, unless it is almost time for your next dose.
- **Do not** take an extra pill or double dose the next day to catch up.
- If you remember the missed dose more than eight hours after you normally take your warfarin you should skip your dose.
- Remember to tell your doctor about any missed or forgotten warfarin doses.

Can I take other drugs while I am taking warfarin?

Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs, as well as natural health products, and vitamins can affect warfarin.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting, changing, or stopping any medicine, vitamin or natural health product.

The following medications may increase or decrease the effect of warfarin (Note: these are only some examples):

- **Antibiotics** (Septra®/cotrimoxazole, Cipro®/ciprofloxacin, Flagyl®/metronidazole)
- **Antifungals** (Diflucan®/fluconazole, Monistat®/miconazole, Nizoral®/ketoconazole)
- **Antidepressants** (Paxil®/paroxetine, Zoloft®/sertraline, Prozac®/fluoxetine)
- **Antiplatelet agents** (Aspirin®/ASA, Plavix®/clopidogrel)
- **Anti-inflammatory agents** (Aleve®/naproxen, Voltaren®/diclofenac, Advil®/Motrin®/ibuprofen, Indocid®/indomethacin)
- Cordarone®/amiodarone

What medicines can I take if I have a headache or a cold?

- Always check with your doctor before taking any drugs or medicine, including antibiotics, herbal products, vitamins, and non-prescription drugs, such as ibuprofen (Advil®/Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®).
- Aspirin® (ASA), ibuprofen (Advil®/Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®) can increase your risk for bleeding. Do not take these medications unless your doctor tells you. Taking warfarin and ASA may be necessary but requires careful supervision.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is safe to take with warfarin, but do not take more than 2000 mg per day unless your doctor tells you.

Can I take vitamins while I am taking warfarin?

Vitamins may increase or decrease the effect of warfarin.

You should avoid taking Vitamin E unless your doctor tells you.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any vitamins.

Can I take herbal medicines while I am taking warfarin?

Herbal products may increase or decrease the effect of warfarin.

You should **avoid taking herbal medicines while on warfarin.**

If you do take an herbal medicine be sure to tell your doctor before starting or stopping it. You may need blood tests more often or your warfarin dose may need to be changed if you start or stop taking herbal medicine.

The following herbal products may increase or decrease the effect of warfarin (Note: these are only some examples):

- Coenzyme Q10 (Ubiquinone)
- Danshen
- Dong Quai
- Echinacea
- Feverfew
- Garlic
- Ginkgo
- Ginseng
- Kava-Kava
- Ma Huang or Ephedra
- St. John's Wort

What should I do if I cut myself or get injured?

Immediately tell your doctor or go to the nearest hospital with an Emergency Department if you get a cut that will not stop bleeding, if you have a serious fall, or if you hit your head.

What should I do if I become pregnant while taking warfarin?

Warfarin should not be taken if you are pregnant or if you are planning to become pregnant. Your doctor may use a different medicine if you need anticoagulant therapy while you are pregnant.

Can I travel while taking warfarin therapy?

You can travel but be sure to tell your health-care provider before you go. You may need an INR test before you leave or while you are on your trip. Remember that sudden changes to your eating habits and activity levels can affect your INR. You should stay as close to your everyday routine as possible. Also, be sure to take enough warfarin with you.

Can I participate in sports or physical activities?

Ask your doctor before starting any new sport or activity, especially if there is a risk of you falling or becoming injured.

Important Tips for Taking Warfarin Therapy

Be careful

- Do not start or stop medicines without asking your doctor.
- Do not take part in dangerous activities or contact sports that may result in injuries.
- Do not make big changes to your diet, lifestyle, or activities without checking with your doctor.
- Do not drink too much alcohol (more than 1-2 drinks per day).
- Do not take an extra pill to catch up on a missed dose.
- Do not take warfarin if you are pregnant or may become pregnant.

Remember to:

- take warfarin exactly the way your doctor tells you.
- eat at regular times and enjoy a similar amount of physical activity every day as changes in diet or activity can affect your INR.
- get your blood tests done when you are supposed to.
- use a medication calendar, it may help you keep track of your warfarin dose, and INR.
- write down any changes in your diet, exercise routine, any missed doses, or any side effects of warfarin.
- tell your doctor about other medicines you are taking (prescriptions medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products).
- talk with your health-care provider before you change, start, or stop taking any medicines or herbal products.
- tell your doctor when you get hurt, sick, or if you become pregnant.
- look for signs of bleeding. Know the signs of serious bleeding and when to get help.
- tell anyone giving you medical or dental care that you are taking warfarin.
- refill your prescriptions on time and at the same pharmacy.
- wear a MedicAlert® bracelet or carry a wallet card that identifies you as a warfarin patient.
- call your health-care provider if you have any problems due to warfarin or if you have any questions.
- keep warfarin out of the reach of children.

You should report:

- any fall or injury to the head or back.
- fever and chills for more than 1 – 2 days.
- vomiting, nausea, or diarrhea for more than 1 – 2 days.
- repeated severe chest pain.
- persistent swelling of feet and lower legs for more than 1 – 2 days, especially if painful.
- yellow discoloration of eyes or skin or any changes to your general physical health.

Things to remember about taking warfarin

- Always take warfarin at the same time each day.
- You may take warfarin with or without food.
- Be sure to have your blood tested regularly.
- Tell everyone giving you medical or dental treatment that you are taking warfarin.
- Tell your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you think you are having side effects due to warfarin.
- Call your doctor if you have any questions or problems.
- Tell your doctor about any changes to your lifestyle, diet, health, medications, scheduled surgery, travel, or other activities.

Notes:

For more information contact:

This information is not intended to take the place of medical advice.
Contact your doctor or healthcare provider for more information.

You should wear a MedicAlert® bracelet or carry this wallet card on you at all times so that others know you are taking warfarin.

ATTENTION

I am currently being treated with
WARFARIN, an anticoagulant.

Dr. _____ Tel. _____



References:

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