

INFORMATION ABOUT WARFARIN (A BLOOD THINNER MEDICATION)

This handout is in four parts:

1. Basic Information
2. Side Effects to Watch For
3. Diet Information
4. How to Stay Safe

BASIC INFORMATION

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE NAMES OF THE MEDICINE?

The generic name warfarin also has brand names – Coumadin® or Jantoven®.

WHY DO I NEED THIS MEDICINE?

Warfarin thins your blood to help keep harmful clots from forming or moving. It is an anticoagulant. "Anti" means against and "coagulant" means to thicken into a gel or solid. It helps make your blood flow easier and not make unwanted blood clots. If your blood is too thick and makes a clot, you could have a heart attack, stroke or other serious problem.

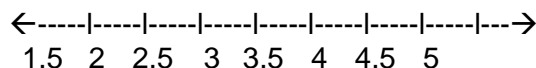
Your doctor or other health care provider has started you on warfarin for one of two reasons:

1. to prevent your body from making unwanted blood clots for
 - patients with an irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation,
 - patients with an artificial heart valve,
 - patients with a blood clotting disorder
 - patients who have had recent surgery or injury that will keep them in bed.
2. to prevent an existing blood clot from getting bigger or moving to another part of your body for patients with a clot in their leg and/or in their lungs or other part of the body.

HOW DO I TAKE THE MEDICINE?

1. Your dose of warfarin depends on:
 - a blood test called "INR" (**I**nternational **N**ormalized **R**atio) and
 - your therapeutic INR range (one example is a range of 2.0 – 3.0)
2. Take this medicine just like your doctor tells you. Do not stop taking **warfarin** unless your doctor tells you to.

Your therapeutic INR range is _____.



**CLOTTING
TOO FAST**

**CLOTTING
TOO SLOW/BLEEDING**

**If your INR is too low, you might make an unwanted blood clot.
If your INR is too high, you might be at risk for bleeding.**

3. If you do miss a dose, call your doctor. Do not take two doses at the same time.
4. Take **warfarin** at the same time each day.
5. You can take the medicine with or without food.

SIDE EFFECTS TO WATCH FOR

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF MEDICINE?

You will have your blood tested often. The test shows how fast your blood clots. The doctor may change your dose to keep your blood within the therapeutic INR range.

Many things might cause the INR blood test to change:

- how much **warfarin** you are taking
- how much vitamin K you eat (in food and vitamins)
- how much alcohol you drink
- Other medicines (over-the-counter and prescription medications)
- If you are sick, have large changes in weight, or are more active.

WHAT COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OR PROBLEMS MAY I HAVE?

Warfarin may cause you to bruise a little more easily. You may also notice slight bleeding from time to time such as:

- Gums bleeding while brushing teeth.
- Bleeding after a cut that stops within a few minutes.
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal
- More nosebleeds that stop quickly.

RARE SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE:

- An allergic reaction to warfarin, such as an itchy rash.
- Skin changes with red areas going to purple, becoming painful, and ending in skin death.
- Painful purple spots on toes.

If you notice any of these, get medical help right away.

ALSO, GET MEDICAL HELP RIGHT AWAY IF YOU HAVE:

- Urine – red or brown
- Bowel movement (stool) - red or black, tarry
- Cough or Vomit (throw up) - coffee colored or bright red
- Severe pain, such as a headache or stomachache
- New bruises without being hurt
- A cut or any bleeding that doesn't stop in 20 minutes
- A serious fall or hit on the head (you might not see the bleeding)
- Dizziness or are very tired all the time
- A new skin rash that may or may not be painful
- Sudden change in vision
- Numbness or weakness on one side of your body

If you are planning to become pregnant, are already pregnant, or breastfeeding, tell your doctor immediately. Taking **warfarin** while pregnant can cause birth defects.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DIET AND WARFARIN

Warfarin is a medication that helps prevent blood clots. It is an anti-coagulant (means "against blood clotting") that helps to prevent clots from forming in the blood. Although it is often called a "blood-thinner", it works in the liver to lower the production of natural clotting factors. If you are taking Warfarin, it is important to follow the dietary recommendations below.

KEEP DIETARY VITAMIN K INTAKE CONSISTENT:

- It is important to eat a normal, balanced diet to help meet your nutritional needs. The goal is to keep the amount of Vitamin K in your diet as close to the same as possible. Do not try to remove all vitamin K from your diet.
- Increasing the amount of Vitamin K in your diet can decrease the effects of Warfarin. Lowering the amount of Vitamin K in your diet can increase the effects of Warfarin.
- If you are aware of foods that contain Vitamin K, you will be better able to keep the amount of Vitamin K in your own diet consistent. See the chart on the next page for the Vitamin K content of foods.
- If taking a multivitamin supplement or a dietary supplement like Ensure, Boost, Glucerna or Carnation Instant Breakfast containing Vitamin K, do so daily and let your physician know.
- Be aware that chewing tobacco is high in vitamin K.

LET YOUR PHYSICIAN KNOW ABOUT ANY SUPPLEMENT (HERBAL/VITAMIN/MINERAL) YOU TAKE.

- Vitamin E (more than 400 IU/day) and vitamin C (more than 500 mg/day) can change the effects of Warfarin.
- Herbal supplements can alter the effects of Warfarin.

ALSO:

Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice. Limit cranberries, cranberry juice, pomegranate and pomegranate juice.

LIMIT ALCOHOL:

Avoid alcohol while taking Warfarin – it can increase the effects of Warfarin.

If you must drink alcohol speak with your doctor first. Limit your intake to 1-2 drinks per day (0-1 for Women, 0-2 for Men)

One drink = Wine- 5 oz, Beer- 12 oz, Liquor- 1 ½ oz

VITAMIN K CONTENT OF FOODS

Food	Portion Size	Vitamin K Content*	Food	Portion Size	Vitamin K Content*
Kale, cooked	½ cup	H	Green scallions, green onions	2/3 cup	H
Spinach	½ cup cooked 1 cup raw	H	Cabbage, green	½ cup cooked	M
Greens (collards, mustard, beet, swiss chard, turnip, endive, dandelion)	½ cup cooked 1 cup raw	H	Romaine lettuce	1 cup	M
Parsley	¼ cup	H	Green leaf lettuce	1 cup	M
Broccoli	½ cup cooked 1 cup raw	H H	Red leaf lettuce	1 cup	M
Brussel sprouts	1 cup cooked	H	Iceberg lettuce	1 cup	L
Oil: soybean	4 tablespoons	H	Avocado	1 small	M
Coleslaw	¾ cup	H	Green beans	1 cup	L
Okra	½ cup	M	Green peas	1 cup	L

*H= high = more than 100 mcg M= Medium = 11-99 mcg L= Low = 0-10 mcg

Low vitamin K foods include: grain products (bread, cereal, rice, pasta); dairy products; meat/fish/poultry; fruits (except avocado).

IF YOU ARE FEELING ILL AND CANNOT EAT FOR SEVERAL DAYS, CALL YOUR PHYSICIAN.

FOR QUESTIONS PLEASE CALL A DIETITIAN AT 434-924-2286.

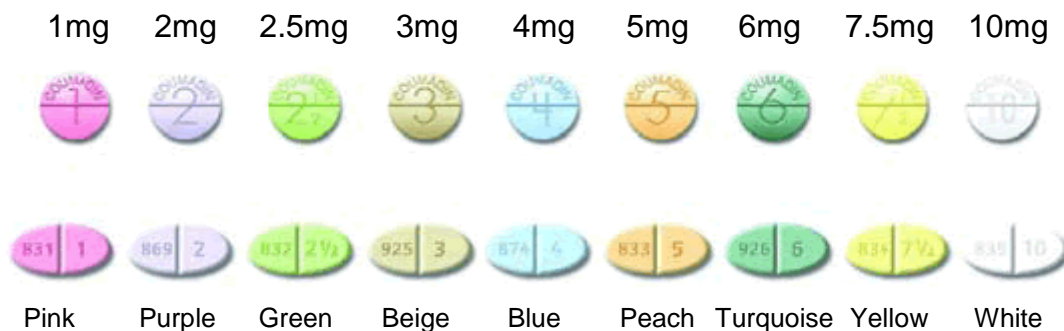
HOW TO STAY SAFE

Taking warfarin doesn't mean you can't enjoy life. Exercise is important to your health. Be sure to take extra care with sharp objects like knives or scissors that could make you bleed. Wear protective equipment or consider changing from sports or activities that can cause injury.

Any medicine with Aspirin also can make keep your blood from clotting (thin). Medicines like Excedrin®, Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), Pepto Bismol®, Alka-Seltzer® and many other over-the counter medicines have Aspirin in them. If you need to take something for pain while on warfarin acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is one of the safest medicines. But it can also keep your blood from clotting so be sure to talk to your doctor about all medicines.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Take your pills at the same time every day.
- Use a pillbox to help you manage your medicines.
- Do not skip a dose of warfarin.
- Do not take extra doses.
- Do not share this medicine with anyone. Keep all medicine out of the reach of children.
- Talk to your health care provider (doctor)
 - When you have any medication changes
 - Before making big changes in your diet
 - If you feel sick or can't eat for more than two days
 - Before you have a procedure or surgery.
- Be sure to keep all your appointments so your blood can be tested regularly (every month)
- If you go to the dentist or any other doctor, tell them you are taking warfarin.
- Carry a card in your wallet or purse with a list of all your medicines.
- You might want to wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace to alert emergency workers that you take warfarin.
- When you buy new warfarin pills, make sure the color is the same as your old pills.



References

1. [Your Guide to Coumadin/Warfarin Therapy](#). Carla Huber, A.R.N.P., M.S., Cedar Rapids Community Anticoagulation Clinic, Cedar Rapids, Iowa under grant from the Agency of Healthcare Research and Quality.
2. [Patient Information Booklet](#), Anticoagulation Clinic, Medical Services Center, University of Virginia Health System, Charlottesville, VA