



Brigham and Women's Hospital Anticoagulation Service *Patient Information*

What is warfarin (Coumadin)?

Warfarin (Coumadin) is an anticoagulant or “blood thinner”. *Anti* means *against*, and *coagulant* refers to *blood clotting*. An anticoagulant helps reduce the risk of clots forming in the blood.

Why do I need warfarin?

Your physician has determined that you have a medical condition that requires treatment with a medication to prevent your blood from forming blood clots when it shouldn't. This treatment is called anticoagulation.

How will my treatment be monitored?

Treatment will be monitored through regular laboratory testing. The blood test is called a PT or protime and is reported as an INR which stands for International Normalized Ratio. After interpreting these results, we will call you to inform you whether or not a change needs to be made in your warfarin dosage.

What should my INR be?

Your target INR depends on the condition for which you are receiving treatment with anticoagulation. The most common INR range for patients is 2.0-3.0. “Low-intensity” is 1.5-2.0 and “high-intensity” is 3.0-4.0.

What will affect my INR?

Several things will impact your INR. These include illness, medications (prescription and over-the-counter) and diet. It is important to inform us of changes in your overall health, medicines, or lifestyle.

What are the side effects of warfarin?

The most common side effect of warfarin is bleeding. To lower the risk of bleeding, your PT/INR should be kept within a range that is right for you.

Do I need to make any changes to my lifestyle when on warfarin?

You should not participate in contact sports or other activities that may result in a serious fall or other injury when on warfarin. For example, you should avoid soccer, skiing, hockey, bicycling without a helmet, etc.

Are there any foods that I should avoid when on warfarin?

Many foods you eat have Vitamin K in them and Vitamin K helps your body make clots. Foods that are high in Vitamin K include leafy green

vegetables, and some peas and beans. Foods do not need to be avoided but it is important for you to keep your diet consistent. Alcohol consumption should be avoided when on warfarin.

What should I do if I need to have surgery, dental work, or another type of procedure performed?

In the event you need surgery, dental work, or another type of procedure, contact the doctor or anticoagulation service who manages your warfarin to determine what should be done with your anticoagulation.

Summary: The Do's and Don'ts of taking warfarin

Do:

- Take your warfarin exactly as prescribed by your physician or anticoagulation service.
- Keep your scheduled blood test - Inform your doctor or anticoagulation service if you are unable to do so.
- Notify your doctor or the anticoagulation service of any new or discontinued medications
- Notify your physician immediately if you experience any signs of bleeding.
- Notify anyone providing you medical or dental care that you are taking warfarin.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet stating that you are on an anticoagulant.

Don't:

- Never "double-up" to make up for missed doses.
- Do not take warfarin if you are pregnant.