

Warfarin Sodium, an Oral Anticoagulant

Why do I need an oral anticoagulant?

- You are being treated with this medication for at least one of the following medical conditions:
 - atrial fibrillation
 - prosthetic heart valve
 - venous thrombosis/pulmonary embolism
 - myocardial infarction (heart attack)
 - other
- Under normal circumstances, blood will clot only in response to an injury, but in your case there is a tendency for abnormal blood clots to form without an injury.
- Abnormal blood clots can form in your arteries, veins, or heart. They are dangerous because they can prevent blood and oxygen from reaching vital organs and tissues. They can also break off and be carried through the blood stream. A heart attack or stroke can occur if they lodge in blood vessels of the heart or brain, or pulmonary embolism when they lodge in the lungs.

What is an oral anticoagulant?

- It is a medication used to prevent and treat abnormal blood clotting (it makes your blood less likely to clot).
- It prevents:
 - blood clots from forming,
 - stops existing clots from growing larger,
 - reduces the risk of blood clots from breaking off and travelling to vital organs (an embolus).

How do I take oral anticoagulants?

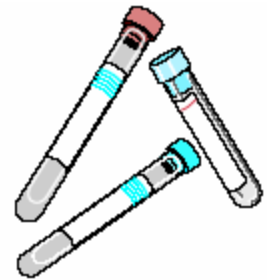
- The colour of the tablet corresponds to the milligram (mg) strength. Please ensure you are taking the correct dosage.
- Take your dose at the same time each day, preferably in the evenings.
- It may be taken with or without food.
- The length of time you will need this medication is individual. Please do not stop taking this medication without consulting with your health care provider.

What if I miss a dose?

- Take the missed dose when you remember at any time on that day.
- Do not double-up on doses. If you do not remember until the following day, omit the missed dose and continue normally.
- Report all missed doses to your doctor or pharmacist caring for your oral anticoagulant therapy.

INR Blood Test

- International normalized ratio (INR) is the blood test that is used to monitor warfarin therapy. This blood test is needed to establish the correct amount of warfarin you need in order to prevent abnormal blood clots from forming.
- It is important to routinely have this blood test. If the blood clots too quickly, there is a greater risk of developing a blood clot. If the blood clots too slowly, there is a greater risk of developing bleeding complications.
- Patients need varying doses of warfarin to attain the desirable INR result.
- When you first start taking warfarin, you will need to have the INR blood test done 2-3 times each week. Once your health care provider has determined an appropriate dosage, you will likely need the test once every 1-2 weeks for a few weeks. If the test remains steady and in the desirable range, then you will require the test once every 3-4 weeks.



Drug Interactions

- Warfarin is extremely sensitive to the effects of other medications.
- Inform your doctor or pharmacist monitoring your oral anticoagulant therapy immediately upon starting or stopping a medication, including over-the-counter products, herbals or vitamins.
- Avoid ASA (Aspirin®) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, (NSAIDs) unless otherwise directed.



Food Interactions

- Intake of foods with large amounts of vitamin K (leafy, green vegetables) may reduce the effectiveness of the warfarin. Vitamin K is the “antidote” used to reverse the effects of too much warfarin.
- Try to keep your diet consistent in quality and quantity and report any significant changes to your doctor or pharmacist monitoring your oral anticoagulant therapy.
- Limit alcohol intake to one alcoholic drink each day or less, as it increases the effect of warfarin.

Side Effects

- **Immediately** contact a health care provider if you have any signs of bleeding such as: (nosebleeds, bleeding gums, coughing up blood, unusual bruising, blood in urine, black bowel movements, cuts that do not stop bleeding).



Safety Precautions

- Report any changes in health that persist longer than a few days.
- Warfarin is contraindicated in pregnancy; notify your doctor or pharmacist immediately if you should become pregnant while taking the medication.
- Inform other health care providers that you are taking warfarin.

- Wear a bracelet (MedicAlert®) or carry an identification card to signify that you are taking warfarin.
- Avoid activities that increase the risk of injury such as contact sports.
- Know contact numbers of your health care provider in case of emergency.



Questions?

Oral Anticoagulation Clinic
(Phone) 473-6600
(Fax) 473-6812

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Developed by: Dr. Jo-Anne Wilson, BScPharm, Pharm.D., Pharmacist

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