

Warfarin

INFORMATION



Hôpital général juif
Jewish General Hospital



CETAC

Centre intégré
universitaire de santé
et de services sociaux
du Centre-Ouest
de l'Île-de-Montréal

Québec



WARFARIN INFORMATION



CETAC

The Centre of Excellence in Thrombosis and Anticoagulation Care (CETAC) team consists of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses and pharmacists who specialize in treating patients with VTE, blood-clotting disorders and patients on blood thinners. We strongly believe that the best way of managing your VTE safely will come from a partnership between you and your CETAC team. We aim to prevent patients from developing VTE whenever possible, to offer patients with VTE the best scientifically approved treatment(s), to provide safe management of therapy with anticoagulants, and to provide patients and their families with information about VTE. We are also committed to advancing research and expanding our knowledge in the care and management of VTE. If you would be interested in participating in one of our research studies related to VTE or would like more information about thrombosis research studies at the Jewish General Hospital, please call the Thrombosis Research Office at 514-340-8222 ext.24817 or ext.23703

Disclaimer

Please note that the information contained in this booklet is not to be considered or accepted as an alternative to medical advice from a doctor or a healthcare provider, or for individual medical needs. All the information contained in this booklet is solely for information purposes and shall not be construed as a medical opinion. You should not delay seeking medical advice, disregard medical advice or deviate from any medical treatment because of the information contained in this booklet. Should you have any questions relating to the information contained in this booklet, you should consult a doctor. If you are sick, or for any emergency, you should consult a doctor or present yourself to an emergency room.

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You have been prescribed warfarin (also known as Coumadin®), an anticoagulant medication sometimes called a “blood thinner.”

Warfarin is not like other medication because it requires regular blood tests to monitor its effect on the blood. Therefore, the dose can be different for each person and can change over time based on blood test results.

Warfarin is a medication that is affected by many other medications, as well as by a person's diet. This means that you will need to report what medications you're on and any changes to your usual medications. It also means that you'll need to keep an eye on what you eat, although changes in diet aren't usually needed. This pamphlet describes how warfarin works, how your dose will be adjusted, and how to take warfarin safely and effectively.

THE JEWISH GENERAL HOSPITAL ANTICOAGULATION CLINIC

The team at the Anticoagulation Clinic, including doctors, nurses and phlebotomy (bloodtaking) technicians, is specialized in managing warfarin and will let you know when your blood tests are due, what the results are, and what dose of warfarin you need. They will need to know how to reach you and be able to leave you voicemail messages in case you are not home.

The Anticoagulation Clinic located on the 3rd floor, Pavilion D, Room B-304 is there to answer any questions you may have during your warfarin treatment and can be reached at (514) 340-8222, extension 25070

As a new patient at the Anticoagulation Clinic, you will be invited to a teaching session which is given every Tuesday morning. If you haven't yet attended the session or would like to attend it again, please call the Anticoagulation Clinic on Tuesday morning to confirm.

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WHAT IS WARFARIN® AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Warfarin is an anticoagulant, which means that it increases the time it takes for your blood to clot. It also prevents existing blood clots from getting bigger, which will give your body time to naturally break them down over time. Blood clots get in the way of normal blood flow and can be harmful if they reduce the blood and oxygen supply to parts of the body. Clots can occur in your veins or arteries, in your heart or your heart valves, or in other areas of the body.

It's important to take your warfarin exactly as prescribed:

- ***if you're taking too little, you'll remain at risk of clotting;***
- ***if you take too much, there is a chance the blood won't clot enough which could cause dangerous bleeding.***

Although warfarin is sometimes called a "blood thinner," your blood will not feel or look any different while you are taking warfarin.

WHY AM I TAKING WARFARIN?

You are taking warfarin either because you've had a blood clot or you are at risk of developing one, which we want to prevent from happening.









Here are some reasons why people take warfarin:

- Atrial fibrillation (irregular pulse or heartbeat)
- Heart valve disease or artificial heart valves
- Stroke
- Blood clot in the leg (called deep vein thrombosis or DVT)
- Blood clot in the lung (called pulmonary embolism or PE)
- Blood clots in other parts of the body (called unusual site deep vein thrombosis)
- Clotting disorders



HOW DO I TAKE THE RIGHT DOSE OF WARFARIN?

Warfarin tablets come in different strengths (or milligrams), and each strength is identified by a different colour.

Dose		Coulour of tablet
	1 mg	Pink
	2 mg	Lavender
	2,5 mg	Green
	3 mg	Tan
	4 mg	Blue
	5 mg	Peach
	6 mg	Teal
	7,5 mg	Yellow
	10 mg	White (<i>Dye Free</i>)

HOW DO I TAKE WARFARIN?

Always take your warfarin exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider. This means taking warfarin once a day, at about the same time every evening. It is important to make it part of your daily routine because it will help you remember to take it. For instance, most people find it helpful to take it at dinner time every day. If you need to take half a tablet, make sure the tablet is cut along the line, into two equal pieces. If you're having trouble cutting your tablets, contact your pharmacist for assistance. Don't cut the tablets more than once because the dose won't be accurate. Warfarin can be taken with or without food. It can also be taken at the same time as your other evening medications.

Warfarin doses can change often. To remember to always take the correct dose:

- ***Write your prescribed doses onto a calendar***
- ***Use a pillbox or dosette box***
- ***Keep track of your warfarin doses and blood test results in a diary, such as the one at the end of this pamphlet***

WHAT IF I MISS A DOSE?

What if I miss a dose? If you've just missed your usual warfarin time, it's important to take the missed dose as soon as you remember, as long as it's before bedtime. If you missed yesterday's warfarin dose, do not take the missed dose. Instead take today's dose at your usual time. Mark in your calendar or diary that a dose was missed and report it to the Anticoagulation Clinic at your next appointment. If you miss more than one dose, contact the Anticoagulation Clinic or your healthcare professional as soon as possible for advice on what to do.

Do not change the dose yourself or double up on the dose if you missed one.

WHAT IF I TAKE AN EXTRA DOSE?

If you have taken an extra dose, call the Anticoagulation Clinic or healthcare professional as soon as possible for advice. Mark on your calendar or diary that you've taken an extra dose.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE WARFARIN IS WORKING PROPERLY?

You won't be able to tell if your warfarin is working by how you feel. Different people need different doses of warfarin. Therefore, if your dose is higher or lower, it does not mean that your health condition is getting better or worse, or that it is better or worse than someone else's on a different dose of warfarin. Warfarin doses are always based on a blood test called the International Normalized Ratio (commonly called INR). The INR indicates how long it takes for your blood to clot.

WHAT SHOULD THE INR RESULT BE?

The INR of a person not taking warfarin is 1. The INR of a person taking warfarin is usually between 2 and 3, which represents the right balance between the risk of clotting and the risk of bleeding.

The staff at the Anticoagulation Clinic can tell you what your target INR should be. The goal of the warfarin therapy is to remain within the target range as much as possible.

Your doctor will adjust your warfarin dose as needed to keep your INR in the target range. If your doctor increases your warfarin dose, your INR will also increase. If your dose is decreased, your INR will also decrease. These changes in your INR are not immediate. They may take 3-5 days after a change in dose.

HOW OFTEN WILL I HAVE BLOOD TESTS?

When you first start warfarin, you will need a blood test more often until the right dose is found to keep your INR in the target range. Once the right dose is found, a blood test is only needed every few weeks, but this may be different from person to person.

You may need blood tests more often if

- It is taking longer for the target INR to be reached
- You have missed a dose or taken an extra dose
- There have been changes to your usual medications (including over the counter medications, vitamins, supplements, and herbal medicines) There have been changes to your diet
- There have been changes in your health
- You notice any of the side effects from warfarin

It is essential that warfarin therapy be monitored properly through blood tests. Otherwise, you could be taking the wrong dose which could put you at risk of dangerous clots or bleeding.

WHAT I NEED TO KNOW TO MANAGE MY WARFARIN THERAPY ?(CONT'D)



WHAT MEDICATIONS CAN INTERACT WITH WARFARIN?

Warfarin is affected by many medications, including prescription medications, over the counter medications, as well as vitamins, supplements and herbal remedies. The effect can either be to increase the effect of warfarin, which can lead to harmful bleeding, or to decrease the effect of warfarin, which could lead to harmful clotting.

To be safe, always assume that any medication can affect warfarin unless you've been told otherwise by a healthcare professional. Always remind any doctor who prescribes medication for you that you take warfarin.

It's important to always let the Anticoagulation Clinic know if there have been any changes to your usual medications.

WHAT MEDICATIONS ARE SAFE TO TAKE WHILE I'M TAKING WARFARIN?

Painkillers:

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is the safest choice if a painkiller is needed. However, if you start taking it more than 3 times a week, let the Anticoagulation Clinic know, as they may need to adjust your warfarin dose.

ASA (acetylsalicylic acid commonly known as ASPIRIN®):

Some people take a small daily dose of ASA as a blood thinning medicine to prevent heart attacks or strokes. If you're already taking ASA, check with your doctor if you need to keep taking it while you're on warfarin. You should avoid taking ASA for pain or fever while on warfarin. Be careful, as some over-the-counter medications contain ASA.

ASPIRIN® is a registered trademark of Bayer Intellectual Property GmbH, used under licence by Bayer Inc. Tylenol® is a registered trademark of Johnson & Johnson Inc.

List of products containing ASA

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 292 • A.C. & C • Acetylsalicylic Acid(ASA) • Aggrenox • Alka-Seltzer • Aspo-ASA • Asaphen • Asatab • Aspirin • Entrophen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equate DailyLow-Dose • Exact Coated DailyLow-Dose ASA • Extra StrengthMuscle & Back PainRelief with ASA • Euro-ASA • Fiorinal • JAMP-ASA • Lowprin • M-ASA • Methosixal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle Relaxant • Neutra-Seltzer • Novasen • PMS-ASA • Praxis • PRO-AAS • Rivasa • Robaxisal • Teva-Oxycodan • Teva-Tecnal • Trianal |
|---|---|--|

Disclaimer:

The list of available products containing ASA changes frequently. If you need to, or intend to, take a product and think that this product may contain ASA, always consult a healthcare professional prior to taking said

CAN CHANGES IN DIET AFFECT MY WARFARIN THERAPY?

Yes. There are two simple points to remember about your diet and warfarin therapy:

- It's important to keep a steady diet, so simply keep up your usual eating habits. Warfarin is affected by the amount of vitamin K you eat, so if you eat a steady amount of foods containing vitamin K, the dose of warfarin you need will also remain steady.

Avoid major changes in your diet, crash dieting or binge eating. Having a steady INR means you'll need less frequent blood tests and fewer changes to your dose of warfarin. It will also mean that it's easier to reach your target INR and stay within that range

- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. This is important for everyone, whether they are taking warfarin or not. If you are interested in losing weight or adopting a healthier lifestyle, speak to the Anticoagulation Clinic about it. Together, you can make a plan to make sure you keep your INR within your target range.

To help you keep the level of vitamin K you eat at a steady level, here is a list of foods that contain vitamin K. It is recommended to keep your intake of these foods at a steady level. For example, from day to day or from week to week.

Vitamin K Content of Common Foods	
Per Serving (125ml or 1/2 cup)	Description
Vegetables & fruits	
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beet greens, cooked, boiled, drained • Collards, cooked, boiled, drained • Kale, cooked, boiled, drained • Spinach, cooked • Turnip greens, frozen, cooked, boiled, drained
Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broccoli, cooked, boiled, drained • Brussels sprouts, cooked, boiled, drained • Cabbage, cooked, boiled, drained • Mustard greens, cooked, boiled, drained • Onion, springs or scallions • Swiss chard, cooked, boiled, drained
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asparagus, cooked, boiled, drained • Celery, cooked, boiled, drained or raw • Chinese cabbage, cooked, boiled, drained • Cucumber, with peel, raw • Endive, raw • Green peas, canned, frozen, cooked, boiled, drained • Kiwifruit • Lettuce, raw • Okra, cooked, boiled, drained • Oregano, dried (15ml /1 Tbsp) • Parsley, raw (10g) or dried (15 ml /1Tbsp) • Prune, dried • Spinach, raw

It's important to report any changes in your health to the Anticoagulation Clinic as soon as possible. Changes in your health, such as diarrhea, vomiting or changes to your appetite can affect your INR.

CAN ALCOHOL AFFECT MY WARFARIN THERAPY?

Yes, large amounts of alcohol can affect warfarin therapy. Drinking up to two drinks a day should not affect your INR, but drinking more than that can dangerously affect your INR. If you drink more than two drinks a day, let the staff at the Anticoagulation Clinic know. You will need to have your INR checked more often to make sure it stays within your target range.

WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD I AVOID WHILE TAKING WARFARIN?

Most people don't have to make any changes to their usual activities while taking warfarin. However, even if you take warfarin exactly as prescribed, your risk of bleeding is higher than for someone who is not taking warfarin.

Here are some suggestions to reduce your chance of injury or bleeding:

- Avoid contact sports such as football, boxing, hockey, or others.
- Make sure to wear protective gear when doing sports, such as a helmet and gloves, if necessary, and stay within your abilities. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush and be gentle when flossing
- Use an electric shaver when shaving
- Do not trim corns or calluses by yourself.
- Consult a podiatrist and let him or her know you are taking warfarin.
- Be extra careful with sharp objects such as kitchen knives and scissors
- Wear gloves when gardening
- Be careful around pets Carry a clean bandage with you in case you scratch yourself and begin to bleed

Because there is a higher risk of bleeding, here are some tips to avoid falls:

- Wear non-slip shoes and avoid walking in your bare socks
- Use a non-slip bathmat in the shower
- Remove any clutter in your home
- Tack down or remove loose rugs
- Use a nightlight in case you need the bathroom during the night
- Use a walker or cane if you are unsteady when you walk
- Use extra caution in rain, ice or snow.
- Walk on paths where the ice has been removed.

Go to the Emergency Department if you fall, hit your head or body, are in a car accident or experience any other major injuries. You may not always see visible signs of bleeding from an internal injury.

IS IT SAFE TO TRAVEL WHILE ON WARFARIN THERAPY?

Yes, as long as your INR is within your target range. Let the Anticoagulation Clinic know if you'll be travelling, and they can make recommendations to help you stay within your range.

Remember, it's important to keep your diet steady and as close to normal as possible. This will also apply while you're travelling.

You may need an INR test while you are away. Make these arrangements prior to leaving on your trip. Make sure to bring your warfarin diary with you so you can continue to keep track of your INR results and warfarin dosage you are taking.

If you consult a doctor while you're away, be sure to inform him or her that you are taking warfarin.

IS IT SAFE TO BECOME PREGNANT WHILE TAKING WARFARIN?

If you wish to become pregnant, it's important to discuss your warfarin therapy with your doctor before you become pregnant. Warfarin can be dangerous to an unborn baby, but there are other blood-thinning medications available that are safe to take during pregnancy. Although warfarin must not be taken during pregnancy, it may be safe to take while breastfeeding. Consult your doctor for advice.

WHO DO I NEED TO TELL ABOUT MY WARFARIN THERAPY?

You must let all of your healthcare providers know that you are taking warfarin because of the risk of bleeding.

Be sure to report that you are taking warfarin if:

- You are prescribed a new treatment or medication
- You consult a new healthcare professional
- You go to the Emergency Department or a new clinic
- You see your dentist or eye doctor
- You see a physiotherapist
- You undergo any spa treatments such as a manicure or pedicure
- You need surgery, even if it's considered a minor procedure

It's an important idea to wear an alert bracelet (such as MedicAlert®) to let others know that you are taking warfarin. Speak to your community pharmacist about getting an alert bracelet.

To be safe, let all your healthcare providers know that you are taking warfarin.

WHAT IF I NEED A PROCEDURE OR SURGERY WHILE I'M TAKING WARFARIN?

It's important to tell the healthcare provider doing your procedure or surgery about your warfarin therapy as soon as possible. There may be special precautions you will need to take well in advance. You may need to go to the Anticoagulation Clinic more often in the period before and after your procedure or surgery to make sure your warfarin is managed safely.

Make sure the Anticoagulation Clinic is aware of whatever recommendations are made by your healthcare provider so that they can monitor your INR.

Warfarin is a medication that acts for several days in your body. For some minor procedures or surgeries, you may be asked to simply skip some of your warfarin doses. In other cases, you may need to stop taking your warfarin a few days before the procedure or surgery and only restart it a few days afterwards. During the time you're not taking the warfarin, you may be prescribed a different blood thinner that acts more quickly and doesn't last as long in the body, so that you are still protected against blood clots. This is called "bridging."

The medications usually used for bridging are different types of heparin, which are taken as an injection once or twice a day. If your warfarin is stopped for several days, you may need to use the heparin injections even when you have restarted your warfarin until your INR has reached your target range.

If you need help with the heparin injections, you will be referred to the hospital's Medical Day Clinic or to the CLSC.



WHAT IF I NOTICE SOME BLEEDING?

The main side effect from warfarin is bleeding. Major bleeding can occur if your INR is too high, but minor bleeding can also occur even when you take your warfarin exactly as prescribed. Keeping your INR within your target range will help reduce your risk of bleeding.

Minor bleeding can include:

- Gum bleeding after brushing teeth
- Occasional small nosebleeds
- Bruising easily
- Bleeding after a minor cut that stops within a few minutes
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than usual

If you have minor bleeding:

Minor bleeding can usually be managed at home, but if you're concerned, consult a healthcare professional. Also contact the Anti-coagulation Clinic, and they will decide if your INR needs to be checked.

Major bleeding can include:

- Urine that is red, dark, or coffee-colored
- Black, red or tarry stools
- Bleeding from the gums, nose or a cut that will not stop within 10 minutes of applying constant pressure
- Vomiting bright red or coffee-ground colored vomit
- Coughing up red-tinged secretions
- Sudden appearance of bruises for no reason, especially on your back, abdomen or chest
- Excessive menstrual bleeding

If you have major bleeding:

Major bleeding can be dangerous. Contact your healthcare provider immediately or go to the Emergency Department.

Other signs or risks of bleeding can be less obvious but also require emergency medical care:

- ***Any falls***
- ***Hitting your head or abdomen***
- ***Severe pain, such as a headache or stomachache***
- ***Unusual pain, swelling or discomfort***
- ***Vision changes or loss of vision***

WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT A BLOOD CLOT?

Blood clots are rare while on warfarin therapy, but they are more likely to happen if your INR is too low.

Symptoms of a blood clot:

- New or sudden warmth in your arm or leg
- New pain in your arm or leg that doesn't get better
- Swelling of your arm or leg
- Redness or change in colour in your arm or leg
- Sudden chest pain or a feeling of chest tightness
- Sudden shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Palpitations, coughing up blood

Blood clots can be serious. If you think you might have a clot, go to the Emergency Department immediately.

KEY POINTS FOR TAKING YOUR WARFARIN SAFELY

- *Warfarin helps protect you from blood clots, but it can also cause bleeding*
- *Take your warfarin as prescribed, at the same time every day*
- *Go for INR blood tests regularly as recommended by the Anticoagulation Clinic*
- *Keep track of your INR results and warfarin doses in a diary*
- *Let all your healthcare providers know you are taking warfarin and report any changes in your medications or your health to the Anticoagulation Clinic*
- *Keep your diet steady and don't consume more than 1-2 alcoholic drinks per day*
- *Watch for any signs of bleeding*

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