

What is Coumadin (Warfarin)?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

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Coumadin (warfarin) is an anticoagulant medication. “Anti” means *against* and coagulant refers to *blood clotting*. An anticoagulant helps reduce clots from forming in the blood. Patients who are taking Coumadin (warfarin) must be watched closely to maintain a safe and healthy lifestyle.

Why do I Need Coumadin?

Coumadin is given to thin the blood and prevent clot formation. There are many conditions that require Coumadin to help the body to function normally. Some people are more prone to clots which can cause serious medical problems such as deep vein clots in the legs, stroke, heart attack, and respiratory distress. Your health care provider will discuss your individual condition for which you are taking Coumadin.

How Does Coumadin Work?

Coumadin blocks the formation of vitamin K dependent clotting factors in your liver. Vitamin K is needed to make clotting factors that help the blood to clot and prevent bleeding. Coumadin is a medication that blocks the harmful clotting factors. Your body can stop harmful clots from forming and keep clots from getting larger.

The amount of vitamin K in your diet may affect your response to Coumadin. Vitamin K is found in dark green leafy vegetables. Foods high in vitamin K can still be a part of your diet when used in moderation. For more information on Coumadin and Vitamin K, see the Greenwich Hospital Patient Education Information Sheet titled “Coumadin and Vitamin K.”

What is the dose of Coumadin?

Coumadin is very patient specific and doses vary from patient to patient. Your doctor will routinely monitor the effectiveness of Coumadin and will advise you on the dose to take. The dose may need to be adjusted periodically based on a blood test called **the INR (International Normalized Ratio)**. Coumadin is taken once a day at the same time every day, usually in the evening or as directed by your health care provider.

Why do I need routine blood tests while taking this medication?

Because of wide variability of dosing Coumadin, your physician will routinely order a blood test. The blood test is called **INR**. The **INR** blood test is needed at periodic intervals throughout your course of therapy. The test measures how fast your blood is clotting and must be kept in the best range for your medical condition as determined by your doctor. It is important for you to get the **INR** blood test on the date/time scheduled for you as your dose is based on the results.

What things may change my INR test results?

Several things can affect your **INR**. This includes sickness, alcohol consumption, diet, and other medications (prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, and herbals). It is important to discuss these factors with your health care provider before starting, changing, or stopping any drug.

What are possible side effects of Coumadin?

The most common side effect is bleeding in any tissue or organ. Numerous factors including travel, changes in diet, environment, general health, and medications may affect your response to Coumadin. You should contact your health care provider if you experience signs or symptoms of bleeding that do not stop after a few minutes, such as:

- Persistent headache
- Red or dark brown colored urine
- Nosebleeds
- Vomiting blood
- Bleeding of gums
- Bleeding when shaving
- Red or black colored bowel movements
- Unusually heavy vaginal bleeding

Bruising is common when taking Coumadin. Any falls or injuries while on Coumadin should be reported to your health care provider.

Are there foods that I should be concerned about while taking Coumadin?

Foods that are high in vitamin K will change the way that Coumadin affects your body. To help Coumadin work more effectively, it is important to keep your vitamin K intake as consistent as possible. For more information on Coumadin and Vitamin K, see the Greenwich Hospital Patient Education Information Sheet titled "Coumadin and Vitamin K Interactions."

What are some potential drug interactions?

It is important for you to inform your health care provider about any medications or supplements that you take. Any drugs that can potentially increase your bleeding risk are a concern. Some common examples are ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin (some patients are on aspirin and Coumadin as advised by their physician). Herbal medications such as garlic, ginger, ginkgo, and ginseng all have increased bleeding risk.

When a healthcare provider prescribes a new drug/medication, you should always ask, "Will the new medication work with my Coumadin dose?"

What should I do if I need surgery and I am taking Coumadin?

If you have any plans for any invasive procedures (including dental work), it is very important that you tell your health care provider that you are taking Coumadin before scheduling the procedure. A plan will be developed prior to the procedure regarding your Coumadin dosing.

I forgot to take my Coumadin yesterday. Should I just double dose today?

DO NOT take an extra tablet to catch up. Take the missed dose as soon as possible on the same day, but do NOT take a double dose of Coumadin the next day to make up for the missed dose. If you forget to take a tablet, tell your health care provider.

References:

Blood Thinner Pills: Your Guide to Using Them Safely. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. August 2010. <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/btpills.pdf>

MedlinePlus: The US Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health. Warfarin Drug Information. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/meds/a682277.html>

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenwichhospital.org and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education

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