

Guide to Coumadin®/warfarin Therapy



Introduction

Coumadin® (generic name: warfarin) is a medication used to keep your blood from clotting. Patients who are on Coumadin®/warfarin must be monitored closely. You will also need to be careful that you do not do something to hurt yourself and cause bleeding. Your doctor will work with you to keep you healthy and safe while you are taking Coumadin®/warfarin.

What Coumadin®/warfarin is and What It Does for You

If your blood is too thick and forms clots, you could be at risk for heart attack, stroke and other serious medical problems. Coumadin®/warfarin is an anticoagulant medicine that helps prevent blood clots. “Anti” means against and “coagulant” means to thicken into a gel or solid. Sometimes this drug is called a blood thinner. Think of syrup being poured—it is sticky and thick and flows slowly. Coumadin®/warfarin helps your blood flow more easily and not clot.

Blood Tests & Importance of Follow-Up Monitoring

Coumadin®/warfarin is monitored by a blood test called an International Normalized Ratio (INR). The INR measures how long it takes for your blood to clot. Your doctor will decide how much Coumadin®/warfarin you need by testing your INR. Your doctor will tell you the INR range that is right for you and adjust your dose of Coumadin®/warfarin to keep your INR within your goal range.

If your INR is below your goal, this means your blood may be too thick and you are at risk for having a blood clot. If your INR is above your goal, your blood may be too thin and you are at risk for bleeding.

When you first start taking Coumadin®/warfarin, you should have your blood checked often. Once your INR is in the target range and the correct dose for your body is reached, your blood can be checked less often. Because your dose of Coumadin®/warfarin is based on the INR blood test, it is very important that you get your blood tested on the date and time your doctor tells you and to always keep your lab appointments. If an appointment has not been scheduled for you at discharge please follow-up with your primary care doctor within 1 week for Coumadin®/warfarin monitoring.

How to Take Coumadin®/warfarin

It is important to always take your Coumadin®/warfarin as directed. Your dose needs to be taken at the same time each day, usually in the evening. Never take a double dose of your Coumadin®/warfarin and never skip a dose unless your doctor tells you to. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you don't remember until the next day, please call your doctor for instructions. If you miss a dose on a weekend or holiday, skip the missed dose and start again the next day. Mark the missing dose in a diary and be sure to tell your doctor. A daily pillbox can help you keep track of what doses to take and when.

Medicines look different: Coumadin® (upper row) and generic warfarin (lower row)



Possible Side Effects/ Adverse Reactions

Side effects with Coumadin®/warfarin may happen. Side effects may include bleeding. To lower the risk of bleeding, your blood Coumadin®/warfarin level will be kept within a range that is right for you. Even when your INR blood test is in range, you might see a little bleeding, like bruises on your body or slight gum bleeding when you brush your teeth. Some people may experience hair loss or skin rashes, but this is rare. If you notice something wrong that you feel may be caused by your medication, call your doctor.

Slight bleeding - you may notice from time to time:

- Gum bleeding while brushing teeth
- Occasional nosebleed
- Easy bruising
- Bleeding after a minor cut that stops within a few minutes
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal

Major bleeding - call your doctor or go to the hospital emergency room if you have any of the following:

- Red, dark, coffee, or cola colored urine
- Bowel movements that are red or look like tar
- Bleeding from the gums or nose that does not stop quickly
- Vomit that is coffee colored or bright red
- Anything red in color that you cough up
- Severe pain, such as a headache or stomachache
- Sudden appearance of bruises for no reason
- Menstrual bleeding that is much heavier than normal
- A cut that will not stop bleeding within 10 minutes
- A serious fall or hit on the head
- Dizziness or weakness

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Use of Other Medications

When Coumadin®/warfarin is taken with other medications, it can change the way other medications work and change your INR. Other medications can also change the way Coumadin®/warfarin works. It is very important to talk with your doctor about all of the other medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, antibiotics, vitamins and herbal products. Any product containing aspirin may put you at higher risk for bleeding when taken with Coumadin®/warfarin. If you take a daily aspirin, talk with your doctor about what dose is right for you. Other medications you get over-the-counter may have aspirin in them. All medications you take should be approved by your doctor, including medications you took before starting Coumadin®/warfarin.

Diet for Coumadin®/warfarin Users

The foods you eat can affect how well Coumadin®/warfarin works in your body. Foods containing high amounts of Vitamin K (like green, leafy vegetables) work against Coumadin®/warfarin and can affect your INR. You do not need to avoid foods containing Vitamin K, but be sure to eat a consistent amount. Do not suddenly start or stop eating large amounts of these foods. Do not make any major changes in your normal diet or start a weight loss plan unless your health care provider tells you to.

Stay Safe While Taking Coumadin®/warfarin

You will need to be careful using objects, such as knives and scissors that could make you bleed. It is very important to know that you can be bleeding and not see any blood. For example, you could fall and hit your head, bleeding could occur under your skull or, you could fall and hurt your arm and notice a large purple bruise (bleeding under the skin). **Call your doctor or go to the hospital immediately if you have taken a bad fall, even if you are not bleeding.**