



Patient & Family Guide  
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# Warfarin Sodium

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[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Warfarin Sodium

## What is warfarin sodium?

- Warfarin sodium (also known as warfarin), is a type of **anticoagulant** (blood thinning) medication. Anticoagulant medications make your blood less likely to clot (thicken into a clump).
- This medication:
  - › Prevents and treats abnormal blood clots
  - › Stops blood clots that have already formed from getting bigger
  - › Lowers the risk of blood clots breaking off and moving to your organs (like your lungs). This type of clot is called an **embolus**.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.**

## Why do I need this medication?

- Warfarin helps to treat these conditions:
  - › Having a higher chance of stroke because of atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)
  - › Having a prosthetic (human-made) heart valve
  - › Deep vein thrombosis (DVT): A blood clot in a deep vein in your arm or leg
  - › Pulmonary embolism (PE): A blood clot that blocks blood flow to an artery in your lung
  - › Antiphospholipid syndrome: Your blood clots too quickly in your veins and arteries
  - › Left ventricular thrombus: A blood clot in a chamber of your heart
  - › Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## How do I take this medication?

- This medication is taken orally (by mouth).
- This medication comes in tablets of different colours. Each colour is a different dose (amount). **Make sure you are taking the right dose**, as told by your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or pharmacist.

### Doses of warfarin sodium

Dose	Tablet colour
1 mg	Pink
2 mg	Light purple
2.5 mg	Green
3 mg	Brown or tan
4 mg	Blue
5 mg	Peach
6 mg	Teal (blueish green)
7.5 mg	Yellow
10 mg	White

- Take your medication at the same time each day.
- You can take this medication with or without food.
- **Do not stop taking this medication before talking to your primary health care provider.**

## What if I miss a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. You can take it at any time on that day.
- **Do not take 2 doses at once.** If you do not remember until the next day, skip the missed dose and take your next dose as usual. Make a note of the missed dose.
- Tell your primary health care provider or pharmacist about any missed doses.

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

## INR blood test

- An international normalized ratio (INR) blood test checks your warfarin therapy (treatment). This test helps your primary health care provider plan the amount of warfarin you need to prevent abnormal blood clots. The right amount is different for each person.
- **It is important to have INR blood tests regularly.**
  - › If your **blood clots too fast**, your INR will be **below target (for example, less than 2)** and there will be a higher risk of getting a blood clot.
  - › If your **blood clots too slowly**, your INR will be **above target (for example, greater than 3)** and there will be a higher risk of bleeding complications (like unusual bruising, nosebleeds, bleeding from your gums, or blood in your pee or poop).
- When you start taking warfarin, you will need to have an INR blood test 2 to 3 times a week.
  - › When your primary health care provider has found the right dose for you, you will be tested once every 1 to 2 weeks, for a few weeks.
  - › If your test results stay in the target range, you will be tested once every 3 to 4 weeks for as long as you take warfarin.

My INR target is: \_\_\_\_\_

## Medication interactions

- **Other medications can affect how well warfarin works.**
- Tell your primary health care provider or pharmacist right away if you start or stop a medication. This includes prescription and over-the-counter products, inhalers, creams, eye drops, patches, herbal products, vitamins, and supplements.
- **Do not** take any non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), unless your primary health care provider or pharmacist tells you to. NSAIDs include:
  - › ASA (Aspirin®)
  - › Ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®)
  - › Naproxen (Aleve®)



## Food interactions

- Foods with vitamin K (like leafy, green vegetables) can change how well warfarin works. You can still eat these foods, but try to eat the same amount each day.
- Tell your primary health care provider if you change what or how much you eat. If you have any questions about this, talk with your primary health care provider or pharmacist about this.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Alcohol makes the effect of warfarin stronger.



**What are your questions? Please ask a member of your health care team.**

**We are here to help you.**

**In Nova Scotia you can call 811 to talk with a registered nurse about your health care questions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

## **What are the possible side effects of warfarin?**

**Call your primary health care provider right away if you have any signs of a lot of bleeding, like:**

- › Coughing up blood
- › Blood in your vomit (throw-up), or your vomit looks like coffee grounds
- › Blood in your urine (pee)
- › Blood in your stool (poop) or black stool that looks like tar
- › A cut that does not stop bleeding even when you keep putting pressure on it
- › A very bad headache
- › A very heavy period

**If you cannot reach them, call 811 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

## Safety

- To make sure you are taking warfarin safely:
  - › Tell your primary health care provider about any changes in your health that last longer than a few days.
  - › Talk to your primary health care provider or pharmacist if you have minor bleeding (like nosebleeds, bleeding gums or bruising) or you get very pale, weak, or tired.
  - › **Do not take warfarin during pregnancy.** Tell your primary health care provider or pharmacist right away if you find out you are pregnant while taking this medication.
  - › Tell your other health care providers that you are taking warfarin.
  - › Wear a MedicAlert® bracelet or carry an ID card to show that you are taking warfarin.
  - › **If you will be having a medical procedure, a dental procedure, or surgery, tell the health care provider doing the procedure or surgery that you are taking warfarin.** They may tell you to stop taking it for a period of time.
  - › Avoid activities with a higher risk of injury, like contact sports (football, hockey, wrestling).



- › Know the phone numbers of your health care providers in case of an emergency.

**If you have questions about this medication, talk with your primary health care provider or pharmacist.**

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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