



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Direct Oral Anticoagulants (DOACs)



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What are direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs)?

- An **anticoagulant** is a blood thinning medication. Direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) are a type of oral (taken by mouth) anticoagulant.

How do these medications work?

- DOACs slow blood clotting in the body. This lowers the risk of forming blood clots.
- If you already have a blood clot, DOACs will:
 - › Lower the risk of it getting bigger
 - › Let your body dissolve the clot over time

Why do I need this medication?

DOACs are used to prevent or treat:

- **Blood clots**, like:
 - › **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**: A blood clot in a deep vein of your arm or leg.
 - › **Pulmonary embolism (PE)**: A blood clot that blocks blood flow to an artery in your lung.

- **Strokes:** A stroke happens when a blood clot or a blockage in a blood vessel stops blood from reaching the brain, which can cause a brain injury. Strokes are often associated with a condition called **atrial fibrillation**.
- **Peripheral vascular disease (PVD):** A blood clot or a blockage in an artery in the arms or legs.

Examples of these medications include:

- › Apixaban (Eliquis®)
- › Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)
- › Edoxaban (Lixiana®)
- › Dabigatran (Pradaxa®)

My medication:

My dose (amount):

How do I take this medication?

- This medication comes as a tablet. Take it orally at the same time each day.

Dabigatran:

- **Do not crush, chew, or break it. This could result in dangerously high levels in your body.**
- Take it with a full glass of water.

Rivaroxaban (15 mg or 20 mg tablets):

- Take it with a large meal. This helps your body absorb (take in) the medication.

What if I miss a dose?

Apixaban:

- If your dose is 5 mg twice a day or 2.5 mg twice a day and you miss a dose but remember within 6 hours of when you should have taken it, take the missed dose right away. Then take your next dose at the usual time. If you missed a dose and it is within 6 hours of your next dose, **do not** take the missed dose.
- If your dose is 10 mg twice a day and you miss a dose but remember within 6 hours of when you should have taken it, take the missed dose right away. Then take your next dose at the usual time. If you missed a dose and it is within 6 hours of your next dose, take the missed dose right away and call your health care provider to talk about the next steps. Keep taking your regular dose twice daily the next day.

Dabigatran:

- If you miss a dose and remember within 6 hours of when you should have taken it, take the missed dose right away. Then take your next dose at the usual time.
- If it is within 6 hours of your next dose, **do not** take the missed dose.

Rivaroxaban:

- If your dose is 10 mg once daily, 15 mg once daily, or 20 mg once daily, take the missed dose as soon as you remember on the same day. Then keep taking your regular dose the next day. **Do not** take 2 doses in one day.
- If your dose is 15 mg twice daily, and you miss a dose but remember within 6 hours of when you should have taken it, take the missed dose right away. Then take the next dose at the usual time. If you missed a dose and it is within 6 hours of your next dose, take the missed dose right away and call your health care provider to talk about the next steps. Keep taking your regular dose twice daily the next day.
- If your dose is 2.5 mg twice daily and you miss a dose but remember within 6 hours of when you should have taken it, take the missed dose right away. Then take your next dose at the usual time. If it is within 6 hours of your next dose, **do not** take the missed dose.

Edoxaban:

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember on the same day. Then take the regular dose the next day. **Do not** take 2 doses in 1 day.

Do not take 2 doses at once to make up for a missed dose.

Medications and foods to limit or avoid:

- **St. John's Wort:** Avoid St. John's Wort while taking a DOAC as it can lower the blood-thinning effect.
- **Grapefruit and grapefruit juice:** Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice while taking apixaban or rivaroxaban as they can make the blood-thinning effect stronger.
- **Do not** take ibuprofen (like Advil[®], Motrin[®]) or naproxen (Aleve[®]). **Do not** take more than 81 mg a day of ASA (Aspirin[®]). This can raise your risk of bleeding.
 - › **Talk to your health care provider about if you should be taking 81 mg a day of ASA (Aspirin[®]) AND your DOAC.**

- **Limit alcohol while taking a DOAC.**

Drinking alcohol while taking a DOAC can upset your stomach and increase bleeding.



- Some medications change how DOACs work:

- › Seizure medications (like phenytoin, carbamazepine, phenobarbital, valproic acid) lower the effect of DOACs.
- › Some antimicrobial medications (like ketoconazole, ritonavir, and voriconazole) make the effect of DOACs stronger.
- › Other antimicrobial medications (like rifampin) lower the effect of DOACs.

- **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.

Warnings

- 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.
- Talk with your primary health care provider before taking a DOAC if you have problems with:
 - › Your kidneys
 - › Your liver
 - › Bleeding
- **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 a blood thinner.** They may tell you to stop taking it for a period of time.
- **Do not take this medication if you are pregnant, or breastfeeding or chestfeeding.** Talk to your primary health care provider about other blood thinners that are safe in pregnancy and breastfeeding or chestfeeding.
- Avoid activities with a higher risk of injury, like contact sports (football, hockey, wrestling).

Call your primary health care provider or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have:

- **Signs of a lot of bleeding:**
 - › Blood in your urine (pee)
 - › Blood in your stool (poop) or black stool that looks like tar
 - › Blood in your vomit (throw-up) or your vomit looks like coffee grounds
 - › A very heavy period
 - › Coughing up blood
 - › Very bad headache
 - › Bleeding that does not stop
- **Signs of a blood clot:**
 - › New severe (very bad) shortness of breath or chest pain
 - › Loss of consciousness (fainting)
 - › Painful swelling, redness, or warmth in 1 arm or leg
- **Signs of a stroke:**
 - › Weakness on 1 side of your body
 - › Trouble talking or thinking
 - › Drooping on 1 side of your face
 - › Vision (seeing) changes
- **Physical injury** (like a head injury, a broken bone, a car accident, or a sports injury)

- **Signs of an allergic reaction:**
 - › Skin rash
 - › Hives
 - › Severe itching
 - › Swelling or tingling of your face, tongue, or throat
 - › Trouble breathing or chest tightness

What are the possible side effects?

- All anticoagulants raise your risk of bleeding. You may have:
 - › Minor bleeding (like nosebleeds, bleeding gums, bruising)
 - › Heavier periods
- Dabigatran may cause:
 - › Stomach pain
 - › Heartburn

Talk to your primary health care provider or pharmacist if you have any of these side effects.

How do I store this medication?

- Keep this medication at room temperature, away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- Keep it out of reach of children and pets.

Notes:

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

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

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