Warfarin Sodium

What is warfarin sodium?

• Warfarin sodium is a medication we call an oral anticoagulant. An anticoagulant makes your blood less likely to clot. An oral (by mouth) anticoagulant is a medication used to prevent and treat abnormal blood clotting.

This medication:

› prevents blood clots from forming
› stops existing clots from getting bigger
› lowers the risk of blood clots breaking off and travelling to vital organs (embolus)

Coumadin® is one brand name for warfarin sodium.

What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.
Why do I need an oral anticoagulant?
You are being treated with this medication for at least one of the following conditions:
› atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)
› prosthetic (artificial) heart valve
› venous thrombosis (blood clot in a deep vein) or pulmonary embolism (artery in the lung blocked by a blood clot)
› myocardial infarction (heart attack)
› other

Usually, blood clots only in response to an injury. Your blood may form abnormal clots without an injury.

How do I take this medication?
• Different-coloured tablets are different dosages (amounts of medication). Please make sure you are taking the correct dosage as told by your family health care provider or pharmacist.
• Take your dose at the same time each day. The evening is best.
• You can take this medication with or without food.
• Do not stop taking this medication without talking to your family health care provider.
What if I miss a dose?

• Take the missed dose as soon as you remember, at any time on that day.
• Do not double up on doses. If you do not remember until the next day, skip the missed dose and continue with the next dose as usual. Make a note of the missed dose.
• Report all missed doses to your family health care provider or pharmacist caring for your oral anticoagulant therapy.

INR blood test

• International normalized ratio (INR) is a blood test used to monitor warfarin therapy. This blood test is needed to plan the correct amount of warfarin for you to prevent abnormal blood clots from forming. The correct amount of warfarin is different for each person.
• It is important to have this blood test regularly. If your blood clots too quickly, there is a greater risk of developing a blood clot. If your blood clots too slowly, there is a greater risk of developing bleeding complications.
• When you first start taking warfarin, you will need to have an INR blood test done 2-3 times each week.
• Once your family health care provider has established the right dosage for you, you will likely need the test once every 1-2 weeks for a few weeks.

• If the test results stay the same and are in the desirable range, you will need the test once every 3-4 weeks.

Drug interactions
• Warfarin is extremely sensitive to the effects of other medications.

• Tell your family health care provider or pharmacist caring for your oral anticoagulant therapy immediately if you start or stop a medication, including over-the-counter products, herbals preparations, and/or vitamins.

• Avoid ASA (Aspirin®) and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) unless otherwise directed.
Food interactions

- Eating foods with large amounts of vitamin K (e.g., leafy green vegetables) may lower the effectiveness of warfarin. Vitamin K is used as an “antidote” to reverse the effects of too much warfarin.
- Try to eat the same quality and amount of food as you usually do, and tell your family health care provider or pharmacist caring for your oral anticoagulant therapy about any big changes.
- Limit alcohol to 1 drink each day or less, because alcohol increases the effect of warfarin.

What are the possible side effects of warfarin?

**Immediately** contact a health care provider if you have any signs of bleeding, such as:

- nosebleeds
- bleeding gums
- coughing up blood
- unusual bruising
- blood in your urine (pee)
- black bowel movements (poop)
- cuts that do not stop bleeding
Safety precautions

• Report any changes in your health that last longer than a few days to your family health care provider.

• You should not take warfarin during pregnancy. Tell your family health care provider or pharmacist immediately if you become 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.

• Avoid activities that increase the risk of injury, such as contact sports.

• Know the phone numbers of your health care providers in case of emergency.

Questions?
Anticoagulation Clinic
Phone: 902-473-6600
Fax: 902-473-6812

Thrombosis Anticoagulation Program
Phone: 902-473-7985
Fax: 902-473-6260
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Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit http://ns.211.ca

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Prepared by: Pharmacy Services
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Illustration by: LifeART Emergency 2 Images, Copyright © 1994, TechPool Studios Corp. USA
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QV85-0373 © February 2019 Nova Scotia Health Authority
The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.