

# Warfarin – also known as Coumadin®



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### Why take Warfarin

Warfarin is a pill that will help your blood flow more easily and keep it from making clots. This drug is sometimes called a blood thinner.

### How to take Warfarin

Always follow your doctor's directions. Take the Warfarin pills at the same time every day, only on the days your doctor tells you. It is important not to skip a dose. If you forget a dose (a dose is the amount of medicine to be taken at a specific time), take it as soon as you can. Never take two doses in one day.

The amount of Warfarin you need depends on results of a blood test. Many drugs and foods can affect the results of this test. Warfarin can be taken at the same time as other medications. Make sure your doctor knows all the medications you are taking.

Since your Warfarin dose may be changed a number of times, you may want to keep track of all your doses in a calendar. Your doctor will need to know exactly how you have been taking Warfarin.

### Blood Test

The blood test you need is called the INR (International Normalized Ratio). This is a test to measure how fast your blood is clotting. Your doctor has decided on a target INR range for you. Ask your doctor what the right INR numbers are for you. The amount of Warfarin you need will change depending on your test results. Keep all appointments for your blood tests. This will help your doctor make sure your levels are not too high or too low.

### Side Effects

Tell your doctor if you have any of the following side effects:

- Bleeding gums while brushing teeth
- Hair loss
- Nose bleeds
- Skin rash
- Easy bruising
- Headaches or body pains



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## When to go to the emergency room

Go to the nearest emergency room if you experience any of the following:

- Red, dark, coffee colored urine
- Vomit that is coffee colored or bright red
- Red or dark black bowel movements
- Severe pain in your head or stomach
- A serious fall or if you hit your head
- Dizziness or weakness
- Bleeding from gums or cuts that will not stop within 10 minutes



## Use of other medications

Taking other medications can cause the level of your INR (International Normalized Ratio, a measure of your clotting level) to go up or down. This can be dangerous. It is very important to talk with your doctor about ALL of the other medicines that you are taking including:

- Prescription medicines
- Over-the-counter products such as Aspirin, Tylenol or Advil
- Vitamins
- Herbal products such as green tea

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medicine. Always ask if it will affect the Warfarin you are taking. Also tell your doctor when the dose of ANY of your medicines is changed. Changing the dose can also affect your INR.

## Other things to tell your doctor

- Tell your doctor if you become pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Warfarin should not be taken during pregnancy.
- Tell your doctor and/or pediatrician if you are breastfeeding.
- Tell your doctor when you are planning to leave home for a long time or take a vacation.
- Tell your doctor when you go to the dentist or when you will be having a medical procedure that may involve some bleeding.
- Tell all your providers including dentists you are taking Warfarin.

## Medical Alert Bracelet

You should get a medic alert bracelet to let other people know you are taking Warfarin. You can order them at a local pharmacy or from the MedicAlert Foundation at: 888-633-4298 or <http://www.medicalert.org/home/Homegradient.aspx>



## Diet While on Warfarin

The foods you eat can also affect your INR (International Normalized Ratio, a measure of your clotting level). Do not make any major changes to your diet or start a weight loss plan without talking with your doctor. Avoid drinking cranberry juice or eating cranberry products. Cranberry can affect your INR blood level.

Even if foods containing vitamin K can change your body's response to Warfarin, you don't have to avoid them. Instead, keep eating the same amount of food containing vitamin K. **Ask your health care provider about a well balanced diet.**

If a new food you eat is high in vitamin K, it **does not** mean you cannot eat it. You should eat only a small amount of it (1/2 to 2/3 cups per serving each day) **OR** leave another vitamin K rich food out of your diet that week. **Consistency is the key.** Limit yourself to one serving of vitamin K rich food per day. Here are some foods that are high in vitamin K:



Garbanzo Beans & Lentils



Turnip & Collard Greens



Broccoli



Swiss Chard



Green Cabbage



Brussels Sprouts



Lettuce & Endive



Green & Herbal Tea



Liver



Spinach

## Limit Alcohol

Alcohol can affect your INR blood level. Drinking more than two alcoholic drinks a day or changing your usual pattern can cause problems. (1 drink = 12 ounce beer, 5 ounce wine, 1 1/2 ounce alcohol). Binge drinking is not good for you. Tell your doctor **if you** drink alcohol either regularly or on occasion.

