

Questions and Answers about Taking Warfarin

(Also known by the brand names Coumadin® and Jantoven®)



Read the answers to these questions before you start taking warfarin. It is important to understand this information so that you take warfarin safely. If you have more questions, ask your health professional.

About Warfarin

1. What is warfarin used for?

Warfarin is a medicine used to help prevent an unwanted blood clot from forming or growing.

2. How can I tell if I am taking the right amount of warfarin?

You can tell the strength of your warfarin pills by the color and the number stamped on them. The bigger the number, the greater the strength. Check to make sure the color and number match the amount your health professional wants you to take.

3. Why is it important for me to keep my appointments with the doctor or nurse who checks my warfarin?

The amount of warfarin you take may need to be changed, especially when you first start taking it. Your dose may be changed depending on how your body responds to warfarin so that you don't have problems like bleeding or stroke.

4. When should I seek immediate medical help?

You should call your health professional or go to the emergency room immediately if you notice any sign of major bleeding, including

- bleeding from the nose, gums, or a cut that does not stop within 10 minutes,
- bruises that appear suddenly for no reason,
- anything you cough up or throw up that is red or coffee colored.
- bowel movements that are red or look like tar,
- If you have a bad fall or hit your head, even if you are not bleeding.

Check your warfarin instructions for other signs to watch out for. Call your health professional immediately if you are not sure about your symptoms.

5. What is the best thing to do if I miss a dose of warfarin?

If you forget to take a dose of warfarin and remember the same day, the best thing to do is to take the dose as soon as you can and tell your health professional. If you don't remember until the next day, take your regularly scheduled dose. *Do not take extra warfarin or double your dose.*

6. Can I be active while taking warfarin?

Be careful to prevent injuries that could make you bleed. Outdoors, always wear shoes and gloves when using sharp tools or working in the yard, and avoid activities that can easily hurt you. Indoors, be careful using knives and scissors, razors, nail clippers and dental floss. Do not use toothpicks.

Telling other health professionals

7. If I go to another doctor or to the dentist, why is it important to tell them I am taking warfarin?

All your doctors and dentists need to know all the medicines you are taking. It is wise to carry a list of all your current medicines with you. A different doctor may not know you are taking warfarin. If you have a medical or dental procedure that may cause you to bleed, warfarin could make you bleed more than normal.

8. Why do I need to tell all my health professionals that I take warfarin when they give me a new medicine?

Other medicines can change the way warfarin works and can make your usual warfarin dose too strong or too weak. That's why you want to always check to see how another medicine will act with your warfarin. Your health professional will discuss with you what is safe and unsafe to take with warfarin.

Supplements and other medicines

9. Should I tell the health professional who checks my warfarin if I take a non-prescription medicine, herbal product, or vitamins while I am taking warfarin?

Yes, always tell your doctor, nurse or other health professional. Never start or stop taking any medicine, herb or supplement without checking with your health professional first. This is important because these products can also change the way your warfarin works. Any time you visit a health professional, bring a list of all the prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines--such as aspirin—and any vitamins and herbal products you take.

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10. When should I call the health professional who checks my warfarin about other medicines or supplements?

You should call the health professional who checks your warfarin when:

- another health professional adds a new medicine
- another health professional stops a medicine you have been taking
- another health professional changes a dose of a medicine you have been taking
- you add or stop an over-the-counter medicine

11. When can I take other medicines, herbal products or supplements?

You can take another medicine or supplement when your health professional has checked your blood and has told you that these other medicines are safe to take with warfarin.

12. What could happen if I take a medicine that contains aspirin or over-the-counter pain medicines like ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) while I am taking warfarin?

If you take a medicine containing aspirin or other pain medicines like ibuprofen while taking warfarin, it will increase your risk of bleeding. Many medicines contain aspirin or ibuprofen so it is a good idea to check the label of pain medicines. Talk to your doctor or nurse about taking any medicines for pain.

Foods

13. When it comes to my diet, what should I do while taking warfarin?

Do not make any big changes in your normal diet or start a weight loss plan unless your health professional tells you to. Learn which foods are high in Vitamin K* and do not suddenly start or stop eating large amounts of these foods. It is also best not to drink alcohol when you take warfarin.

* Some foods that are high in Vitamin K are kale, chard, mustard and collard greens, spinach, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green onions, lettuce, parsley, and beef or pork liver.

14. What should I do if I ate foods that I am not sure were safe to eat while taking warfarin?

If you are not certain about something you already ate, call the health professional who checks your warfarin and ask for advice.

Testing your blood for INR

15. Why is it important for me to have my blood tested for INR while I am taking warfarin?

The INR measures how well warfarin is working by showing how long it takes your blood to clot. The doctor will adjust your warfarin dose to keep your INR in the right range for you. This is called your “goal range.” When your warfarin level is in your goal range, you will get the most benefit from warfarin but with less side effects. Your blood is tested for INR more often when you start taking warfarin. Once you are in your goal range, the INR is tested less often.

16. What is my INR goal range?

Your doctor will tell you your goal range. For most patients, the INR goal range is from 2.0 to 3.0, with a goal of 2.5. For some medical conditions, the range is from 2.5 to 3.5, with a goal of 3.0.

17. What does it mean when my INR number is below my “goal range”?

An INR number below your “goal range” means that there is a higher risk of having a blood clot, and a greater chance that you will have side effects.

18. What does it mean when my INR number is above my “goal range”?

An INR number above your “goal range” means that there is a higher risk of bleeding and a greater chance that you will have side effects.

19. Once I have reached the right dose of warfarin for me, how often should my blood be tested for an INR number?

Once you have reached a steady dose of warfarin that is right for you, your blood should be tested for an INR number one time a month. Even after you are on the right dose of warfarin, there may be times when you are outside of your goal range and need to have your blood tested more than once a month. It is very important that you have your blood tested on a regular basis, keep lab appointments and reschedule them if necessary.