

Warfarin

(Coumadin®)

Pharmacy Services

This is intended as a general reference.

It does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.



What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a medicine used to stop blood clots from forming or from getting any bigger. Warfarin does not dissolve existing clots. The body naturally dissolves the clot on its own.

Warfarin helps to treat and prevent clots in the veins, arteries, lungs and heart. Sometimes, people call warfarin a “blood thinner” because it makes you bleed more easily, but it does not actually thin the blood.

Your doctor has prescribed warfarin for this reason:

- ☐ to prevent blood clots when you have an irregular heart beat (atrial fibrillation)
- ☐ a blood clot in your leg or arm (deep vein thrombosis)
- ☐ a blood clot in your lung(s) (pulmonary emboli)
- ☐ to prevent blood clots after having a heart valve put in place
- ☐ other: _____

This is how long we expect you will take this medicine: _____

This is your target INR result while taking warfarin: _____

Why should I take this medicine?

Our blood must be able to clot to protect us when we hurt ourselves. But sometimes unwanted clots can form. The clot in a vein or artery becomes a concern when it gets bigger or when it breaks away and travels to other parts of the body. Warfarin prevents blood clots from forming or getting bigger.

How does warfarin work?

Your body uses Vitamin K from your diet to make clotting factors. These are the things that help the blood to clot. Warfarin interferes with the process of making clotting factors by blocking the effects of Vitamin K.

How do I take warfarin?

- Take warfarin exactly as prescribed.
- Take it with water, with or without food
- It is best to take the medicine at the same time each day so you don't miss a dose. Try not to take it within a few hours of getting your blood test. We suggest taking this medicine in the evenings and having blood tests done in the mornings.
- If you do miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you remember the next day or close to the time of your next dose, just take your next scheduled dose.
Do not double the dose to make up for the missed dose. If you miss a dose before a blood test, make sure you tell your doctor of the missed dose.
- **Do not** stop taking this medicine or adjust your dose without first talking to your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Do not** take these medicines or medicines with these as an ingredient unless directed by your doctor or pharmacist:
 - acetylsalicylic acid or ASA (Aspirin®)
 - ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)

Did you know? Each strength of warfarin is a different coloured tablet. If the colour of the tablet changes when you go to get a refill of warfarin, ask your pharmacist about the change.

Can I take other medicines while taking warfarin?

Warfarin can interact with many different medicines.

Check with your pharmacist or doctor at these times:

- before starting new medicines or supplements, including herbal medicines, and alternative and natural products
- before stopping any medicines or supplements, including herbal medicines, and alternative and natural products

Always remind the person prescribing medicines for you that are taking warfarin.

Try to use the same pharmacy for your medicines.

What should I expect?

While taking warfarin, you will need to go for blood tests.

We call this test an INR test. The medical name is International Normalized Ratio (INR). This blood test compares how long it takes for your blood to clot to normal blood.

Your target INR depends on why you are taking warfarin.

Your doctor needs this blood test to make sure the dose of warfarin is right for you.

- If your INR is too low, your doctor will increase your dose.
- If your INR is too high, your doctor will decrease your dose.

The longer you are taking warfarin, the less you will need to go for blood tests.

What should I watch for?

To reduce the chances of any unwanted side effects, you will go for blood tests regularly to check your INR.

Some side effects to watch for:

- bruising more
- mild bleeding of the gums after brushing your teeth or flossing
- bleeding longer after cutting yourself
- heavier than usual monthly bleeding (menses or periods)

Tell your doctor or pharmacist if any of these side effects bother you, don't go away, or get worse.

Go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 9-1-1

if any of the following happen.

- signs of extreme bleeding:
 - bloody or black, tarry stools (poop)
 - blood red or brown urine (pee)
 - coughing up or throwing up blood or brown material that looks like coffee grounds
 - red spots on the skin
 - bleeding of any kind that does not stop or slow down with pressure
 - bleeding from the eyes, gums, or nose
- chest pain, irregular heartbeat, palpitations
- trouble breathing, wheezing
- severe headache that does not go away with pain medicine
- painful, blue or purple toes
- dizziness, weakness
- sudden swelling of the abdomen (belly)
- back pain that does not go away with pain medicine



How will warfarin affect my daily life?

Diet: A normal, balanced diet is important to your health.

Vitamin K from food plays a role in the clotting process. Certain vegetables and oils naturally have Vitamin K.

Even though Vitamin K can affect how warfarin works, do not stop eating vegetables. Vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. Instead, try to keep the amount of vegetables in your diet the same every day.

Some foods that are high in Vitamin K include:

asparagus	lettuce
broccoli	mustard greens
Brussels sprouts	parsley
cabbage	scallion
cauliflower	spinach
cucumber with peel	turnip greens
endive	
oils (canola, vegetable, soybean)	

Physical Activity: Regular exercise is important for your health. Regular activity also helps with circulation.

Most exercise is safe. Examples of good types of exercise: walking, cycling (wearing a bike helmet), swimming, and golf.

Try not to do any activities where injury is common, such as contact sports.

Your health: Illness can affect warfarin and how it works.

Contact your doctor in these situations:

- If you have an illness where you have a fever, are throwing up (vomiting), or have diarrhea, and this lasts for more than a few days
- If you are not able to eat for several days

Medical and dental care: Tell anyone giving you medical or dental care that you are taking warfarin. This includes such things as dental hygiene, physiotherapy, massage therapy, and acupuncture.

Medical Alert: It is a good idea to carry something saying you are taking warfarin. It could be a medical alert bracelet, necklace, or wallet card.

Travel: Before you travel, contact your doctor. You might need an INR test before you go, or while you are away.

If you are taking a long flight or trip, take time each hour to stretch your legs and move around. This keeps your blood circulating.

Alcohol: Alcohol might affect how warfarin works. If you drink alcohol, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how much alcohol is safe for you. Usually, it is safest to have no more than 1 to 2 drinks in a day.

Pregnancy: Warfarin should not be taken during pregnancy. It is best to use birth control while on warfarin. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.

If you have any questions about this medicine:

- Ask your pharmacist.
- Ask your doctor.
- Call HealthLinkBC **8-1-1** or TTY 7-1-1
 - Speak to a nurse any time, any day.
 - Speak to a pharmacist any day from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.
 - Speak to a dietitian or exercise professional weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

HealthLinkBC is open 24 hours. Available in 130 languages. For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.