



WHAT is warfarin?

- ❖ Warfarin is the generic name for Coumadin® (brand or trade name).
- ❖ Warfarin belongs to a class of medications called anticoagulants. Warfarin helps prevent clots from forming in your blood.

WHY am I taking warfarin?

- ❖ You are taking warfarin because you have a medical condition that puts you at risk for forming dangerous blood clots, or you already have a blood clot that requires treatment. Dangerous blood clots can lead to stroke or death if untreated.

HOW do I take warfarin?

- ❖ Warfarin is taken once daily at the same time every day, preferably in the evening, with or without food. Taking warfarin in the evening makes it easier for health care providers to adjust your dose if needed.
- ❖ If you miss a dose of warfarin, take the missed dose as soon as possible within 12 hours of your missed dose. If it has been more than 12 hours, do not double up the next day! Write the day of your missed dose on your calendar, and let your health care provider know at your next visit.

Why is warfarin use monitored so carefully?

Warfarin is a medication that requires careful and frequent monitoring to make sure that you are being adequately treated, but not “over”- or “under”-treated. If you have too much warfarin in your body, you may be at risk for bleeding. If you have too little warfarin in your body, you may be at risk for forming dangerous blood clots. Medications, food and alcohol can also interfere with warfarin, making close monitoring even more important.

What is “INR”?

- ❖ “INR” stands for International Normalized Ratio and is a blood test that helps determine the right warfarin dose for you.
- ❖ The INR tells us how much warfarin is in your bloodstream and is a measure of how fast your blood clots.
- ❖ A “high” INR means you are more likely to bleed (your blood does not clot very fast).
- ❖ A “low” INR means you are more likely to form a clot (your blood clots very fast).
- ❖ All patients will have an INR goal depending on their medical condition(s).

What are the possible side effects of warfarin?

The major side effect of warfarin is bleeding (especially when your INR is too high). Here are some symptoms of bleeding to look for and to report:

- Unusual bruising or bruises that won't heal
- Bleeding from your nose or gums
- Unusual color of urine or stool (including dark brown urine, or red or black/tarry stools)

What do I need to know about drug interactions with warfarin?

Many drugs can potentially interfere with warfarin and may cause your INR to change, putting you at risk for bleeding or a clot. These drugs include prescription medications, over-the-counter medications (like aspirin, ibuprofen – Advil[®], Motrin[®], naproxen - Aleve[®]), and dietary and herbal supplements. They should be avoided unless otherwise directed by your health care provider. Acetaminophen (Tylenol[®]) at recommended doses is okay for pain and fever relief.

What role does my diet play?

The amount of vitamin K in your diet may affect your body's response to warfarin. Certain foods (like green, leafy vegetables) have high amounts of vitamin K and can decrease your INR. You should not avoid foods high in vitamin K, but it is very important to try to maintain a consistent diet every week.

What about alcohol?

Alcohol use also may affect your body's response to warfarin. Excessive use can lead to a sharp rise in your INR and increase your risk for bleeding. Although it is best to avoid alcohol while you are taking warfarin, it may be okay for you to have limited alcohol intake. Please discuss this with your health care provider.

Safety Tips

- ❖ Carry a wallet ID card and/or wear an emergency alert bracelet.
- ❖ Tell all health care providers (physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, etc.) that you are taking warfarin, especially if you have any planned surgeries or procedures.
- ❖ Alert your health care provider if you are or become pregnant while taking warfarin.
- ❖ Plan ahead when traveling—be sure you have enough of your warfarin and arrange for appropriate blood testing follow-up. And watch your diet!
- ❖ Avoid any sport or activity that may result in a serious fall or injury.
- ❖ Use a soft-bristled toothbrush to protect gums.
- ❖ Use an electric razor if you are prone to cut yourself when shaving.

Key Points

- ❖ Keep all clinic and blood testing appointments!
- ❖ Report any signs and symptoms of bleeding or if you notice new chest pain, shortness of breath or one-sided weakness.
- ❖ Ask about drug interactions whenever you start, stop or change a medication (see contact information below).
- ❖ Be consistent with your diet.

If you have any questions, please contact your physician, nurse or pharmacist!

A one-hour class entitled “What You Need To Know About Warfarin (Coumadin)” is offered through PAMF’s Education Division at the Palo Alto Center. Please call 650-853-2960 for more information.

For a list of all PAMF departments and services, including a directory of health education classes, please visit pamf.org.