

Anticoagulation Therapy

What is anticoagulation?

Coumadin (also known as Warfarin) is an anticoagulant. *Anti* means *against*, and *coagulant* refers to *blood clotting*. An anticoagulant helps reduce clots from forming in the blood. Your doctor wants you to take Coumadin because your body may make clots that you don't need. These clots can cause serious medical problems such as a stroke. Coumadin is used to help prevent and treat blood clots in the legs and lungs, and may be prescribed for patients who have an irregular heartbeat or a heart-valve replacement.

How does it work?

Coumadin blocks the formation of vitamin K-dependent clotting factors in your liver. Vitamin K is needed to make clotting factors that help the blood to clot and prevent bleeding. Vitamin K is found naturally in foods such as leafy green vegetables.

How much Coumadin should you take?

Your doctor determines how much Coumadin you need to take by regularly checking a blood test called PT (prothrombin time) test that is reported as an INR (international normalized ratio). This test reports how fast your blood is clotting. Based on the results your Coumadin dosage may need to be increased or decreased with every test.

When should you should have a PT/INR test done?

When you first start taking Coumadin, you may have to have a PT/INR test every few days, then perhaps once every 1-2 weeks. It is important to have the PT/INR tests done in the morning in case your dose of Coumadin needs to be modified to help keep your blood clotting level in the best range for your medical condition.

Things that may change PT/INR test results

Several things, such as sickness, diet and other medicines, may affect your PT/INR. Before starting any new medication please ask your doctor if it is ok to take with Coumadin. Some nonprescription drugs that may interact with Coumadin include aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), naproxen (Aleve), Zantac, and some herbal medications.

While on Coumadin, it is important for you to keep your diet consistent so the amount of vitamin K you eat is consistent. Large changes in the amount of vitamin K you eat may affect how fast your blood is clotting. You do not need to avoid foods that have Vitamin K, but you should not eat too many foods that have very high vitamin K content such as green tea, seaweed, kale, swiss chard, parsley, and cilantro.

When you should contact your doctor

- Blood in urine or stool
- Bleeding from cuts, gums, or nose that does not stop
- Significant increase in bruising or tiny pinpoint red or purple dots (petechiae) that appears as a rash
- Inform any doctor or dentist you see that you are taking Coumadin, especially before any surgical procedure.