Patient Information

YOU HAVE BEEN PRESCRIBED

WARFARIN

Warfarin

Warfarin is an anticoagulant medicine that stops harmful clots from forming in your blood vessels by making your blood take longer to clot. It is sometimes called a “blood thinner.” It is also used to stop existing clots from getting bigger and to stop parts of a clot breaking off and travelling to other parts of the body.

Why do I need an oral anticoagulant?

Your doctor will have prescribed warfarin for you if you are at risk of developing a harmful clot or if you have an existing clot. Here is a list of some of those conditions:

- Antiphospholipid Syndrome (APS)
- Biological or mechanical heart valve (AVR or MVR)
- Atrial Fibrillation (A Fib) - irregular heartbeat
- Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – clot in the leg or arm
- Pulmonary Embolism (PE) – clot in the lung
- Cerebrovascular Accident (CVA) – stroke

Warfarin is sometimes used for reasons other than those listed. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you are not sure of your diagnosis.

NOTE: This leaflet is for general information only. It does not replace medical advice.

How do I take warfarin?

- Take warfarin once a day in the evening, at about the same time each day. Take warfarin tablets with a glass of water.
- Warfarin tablets are colour- coded to help you take the correct dose. They are available in 1mg (light brown), 3mg (blue), and 5mg (pink). You need to know exactly what dose you are taking in milligrams (mg) and not just the colour. If you are unsure about the colour and strength of your tablets discuss with your nurse, pharmacist or doctor.
- Do not confuse the dose in mg with the number of tablets you take.
- The length of time you will need to take warfarin for, will depend on the reason you need to take it. Some need to take warfarin for months, others will need to take it for longer, and some for the rest of their lives.

What brand should I take?

- There are different brands of warfarin (examples are Warfant® and Warfarin Teva). You should stick to the same brand.
- If you are given a different brand talk to your pharmacist. You will also need to let the nurse/doctor who manages your warfarin, know, if the brand changes.

Warfarin Teva®:

Warfant®:

Do I need blood tests to monitor warfarin?

- Yes, you must have a regular blood test called an INR test (International Normalised Ratio). This test can be done either at the Warfarin Clinic or the GP surgery.
- The dose of warfarin that you will need to take will depend on your INR test result.
- Any changes that are made to your warfarin dose will be explained to you at the Warfarin Clinic/GP. If you do not understand your new dose, ask the nurse, pharmacist or doctor to explain it again.
- Check with your doctor or nurse how often you need to attend for blood tests, and when your next blood test is due.

What do I do If I forget to take a dose of warfarin?

- It is important that you do not miss a dose.
- If you miss a dose and remember the same day, you can still take that dose.
- If you forget a dose and remember the next day, do not take the missed dose to catch up, but take your next dose when it is due.
- **Do not take a double-dose to make up for a missed dose.**
- Speak to your nurse, pharmacist or doctor for advice if you are missing doses.

What do I do if I take too many tablets?

If you have taken too many warfarin tablets by accident, contact the Warfarin Clinic/GP (or Out of Hours GP) immediately and have your blood checked.

What are the side effects of warfarin?

You may feel colder than usual when you are taking warfarin. It is not unusual to bruise easily while you are taking warfarin, and bleeding will take longer to stop if you cut yourself. The bleeding should stop when pressure is applied for a few minutes, with a clean dry dressing. Severe bleeding is the most serious side- effect, although this is rare.

Less serious:

- Mild skin rash or skin itch
- Minor bruising
- Women: heavier periods than usual

Talk to your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor

More serious:

- Cuts that will not stop bleeding, nosebleeds (longer than 10 minutes)
- Coughing up blood
- Blood in vomit
- Blood in stool (red or black faeces)
- Blood in urine (red or dark brown pee)
- Severe or unexplained bruising
- Sudden, severe headache
- New episode of dizziness or weakness

Contact your doctor immediately or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

Very serious:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face, lips, throat, or tongue
- Hives, skin rash or itching
- Severe bloody diarrhoea
- Severe bruising or bleeding
- Seizures

Call an ambulance at once. You may be having a serious bleed or an allergic reaction. Dial 999 or 112 for Emergency Services.

This is not a complete list of side- effects. For specific advice, refer to your patient information leaflet in your medicine pack. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about any side effects that you experience.

Can I play sports?

Continue to do regular exercise and play sports. You may need to avoid any activity or sport that may result in a serious fall or injury such as certain contact sports. Discuss with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.

How can I avoid injuries?

- When taking warfarin, you can do all your normal daily activities, but you are at risk of excess bleeding if you get injured.
- If you do cut or hurt yourself, clean and treat minor cuts and scrapes immediately. Even if there are no visible signs of injury tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about any falls or knocks to the head or body.
- If you are having any other treatments from healthcare or complementary therapists e.g. Physiotherapist, Osteopath, Acupuncturist, or any other treatments that can cause bleeding, tell them in advance that you are taking warfarin.

What happens if I need a medical or dental procedure?

- Bleeding from medical and dental procedures may be increased if you are taking warfarin.
- Tell your doctor or dentist that you are taking warfarin well before any planned procedures. This includes operations or minor procedures in hospital/GP Surgery/Dental Practice.
- Your doctor/dentist will tell you when you need to stop taking your medication if necessary, and when to restart it.
- If you are having a tooth extraction your dentist will need to see a recent INR result to ensure it is safe to provide treatment. Contact the Warfarin Clinic/GP at least one week before a dental extraction so that an INR test can be done.

- Always tell the dentist if you have had a heart valve operation as you may need to have antibiotics before your dental procedure.
- Do not stop taking your warfarin unless you have discussed with your doctor or dentist.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

- If you plan to become pregnant or think you are pregnant, it is very important to contact your doctor/Warfarin Clinic straight away.
- Warfarin is not usually used in pregnancy but may need to be used rarely for certain patients. Discuss with your doctor/nurse/pharmacist.
- Warfarin may be used in breast-feeding. Discuss with your doctor/nurse/pharmacist.

Can I take other medications with warfarin?

- As other medicines may interact with warfarin, you need to check with a pharmacist, nurse, or doctor before starting any new medicines or stopping any of your regular medicines.
- Check with your pharmacist/nurse/doctor before you buy any medicines, vitamins, supplements, or herbal medicines, without a prescription, as some are not suitable to take with warfarin.
- Avoid taking any medicines that may increase your risk of bleeding. Do not buy any product containing Aspirin or Ibuprofen without a prescription unless your doctor has specifically prescribed them for you.
- Always check with your doctor before you are prescribed any new prescription medicines as some can increase your risk of bleeding (such as anti-inflammatory medicines; examples include Diclofenac, Naproxen).
- Paracetamol may be taken for pain but inform the Warfarin Clinic Nurse/Pharmacist or GP if you are taking it as you may need your INR checked if you don't normally take it.
- If you are prescribed a new medicine by your doctor, for example certain antibiotics, you will need to have your blood test done after 3-5 days.

Do I need to change my diet?

- You should keep a healthy and balanced diet.
- Foods that are high in Vitamin K can affect your INR. The following is a list of some foods that are high in Vitamin K. You do not need to avoid these foods, as they are very healthy, but you should keep to roughly the same amount in your diet.
- Foods very high in vitamin K include: broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, collard greens, dark green lettuce, endive, kale, liver, parsley, spinach, scallions, spring onions, seaweed, and turnip greens.
- Foods high in vitamin K include: asparagus, red leaf lettuce, watercress, canola oil, soya oil and rapeseed oil. (Note: not every food is covered in these lists).
- Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist and let them know if you plan to change your diet, or your amount of these foods.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you want to take a new herbal supplement, herbal teas, plant juices or nutritional supplement drinks. Some are not suitable with warfarin.

Can I take grapefruit juice or cranberry products?

- Avoid drinking grapefruit juice, cranberry juice or taking other cranberry products (for example capsules or concentrates). Discuss with your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor.

Can I drink alcohol?

- Alcohol may make your INR go very high, which can lead to bleeding problems.
- You should only drink alcohol in small amounts and do not drink more than the safe limits of alcohol per week, as this can increase your risk of bleeding with warfarin.
- A small amount is no more than two units a day. A unit is half a pint of beer, a small glass of wine or one measure of spirit.
- Discuss safe alcohol limits with your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor.
- It is dangerous to binge drink while you are taking warfarin.
- If you give up alcohol completely for a period of time, tell the Warfarin Clinic/GP as they may need to change your warfarin dose.

Can I travel when taking warfarin?

- If you have had a clot in your lung, leg or arm discuss travelling with your nurse, pharmacist or doctor.
- You will need to have your INR checked before going away so you can be sure of the correct dose when away from home. You may also need to have your INR checked while you are away, depending on the length of time you are away.
- Remember to take enough warfarin tablets with you while you are away. Always remember to take your warfarin dosing instructions with you. Do not binge drink on holidays and try to keep to your usual diet.

Can I get vaccinations?

You can have vaccinations if you are taking warfarin. You will need to tell the nurse, doctor, or pharmacist that you are taking warfarin so they can monitor you.

For further information:
www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/vte/resources/