

Warfarin: Tips for Safe Use



What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a pill that prevents blood clots and keeps existing blood clots from getting bigger. It helps prevent heart attacks, strokes, and other problems caused by blood clots. Coumadin is a common brand name for warfarin.

It's important to know how to take warfarin safely. Warfarin can cause bleeding problems, because it slows how long it takes your blood to clot.

When you are taking warfarin, you could have problems when:

- You take other medicines. Some medicines can change the way warfarin works so you bleed too easily.
- You suddenly change how much vitamin K you eat. Vitamin K helps your blood to clot.
- You fall or are injured. An injury could cause bleeding that is hard to control.

Be careful with other medicines

Tell your doctor about all prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, antibiotics, vitamins, or herbal products you take.

Many things interfere with warfarin, including:

- Over-the-counter medicines, such as aspirin and ibuprofen, laxatives, and stomach medicines such as Alka-Seltzer or Pepto-Bismol.
- Vitamins and herbal products, such as multivitamins, ginkgo biloba, and garlic pills.
- Many other prescription medicines. Tell every health care provider you see that you take warfarin.

Safety tips

- Take your medicine at the same time each day. Most people take their warfarin in the evening.
- Use a daily medicine planner to write down every medicine and vitamin you take. Keep track of when and how often you take each one.
- Before any surgery or test (such as a colonoscopy), ask your doctor if you need to stop taking warfarin for a short time beforehand. Your doctor will tell you when it is safe to start taking your medicine again.
- Get regular blood tests to help your doctor make sure you are taking the right amount of warfarin. The test results tell your doctor whether your dose needs to be changed.
- Make a plan with your health care provider so you know what to do if you miss a dose of warfarin. If you don't have a plan and you miss a dose, call your doctor.
- Wear a medical alert tag that shows you take warfarin.

- Do not use this medicine if you are pregnant. Talk to your doctor about how you can prevent pregnancy. If you think you might be pregnant, call your doctor. If you plan on getting pregnant, talk with your doctor about what medicine you can take.
- Rearrange furniture and electrical cords to keep them out of walking paths.
- Keep stairways, porches, and outside walkways well lit. Use night-lights in hallways and bathrooms.

Get a steady amount of vitamin K

Vitamin K helps your blood to clot so wounds don't bleed too much. Suddenly changing the amount of vitamin K you eat each day could keep warfarin from working well. Try to keep the amount you eat about the same from day to day. Foods high in vitamin K include:

- Kale, cabbage, spinach, turnip greens, collard greens, Swiss chard, mustard greens, and lettuce.
- Canola and soybean oils.
- Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, and asparagus.

Prevent falls and injuries

Make these changes in your life to prevent falls:

- Wear slippers or shoes with nonskid soles.
- Use a cane or a walker if you need one.
- Put things within easy reach so that you don't have to reach over your head for them.
- Choose activities or sports that have a lower risk of injury, like swimming and walking. If you take part in activities that put you at risk of falling or injury, wear protective equipment.

Make these changes in your home to prevent falls:

- Remove raised doorway thresholds, throw rugs, and clutter.

When to call a doctor

Know the signs of bleeding.

Call 911 if:

- You cough up blood.
- You vomit blood or what looks like coffee grounds.
- You pass maroon or very bloody stools.
- You have a sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches. (It may be a sign of bleeding in the brain.)

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- You have new bruises or blood spots under your skin.
- You have a nosebleed that doesn't stop quickly.
- Your gums bleed when you brush your teeth.
- You have blood in your urine.
- Your stools are black and look like tar or have streaks of blood.
- You have heavy period bleeding or vaginal bleeding when you are not having your period.