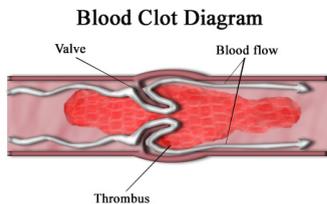


Peter Zajac, DO, FACOFP, *Author* • Merideth C. Norris, DO, FACOFP, *Editor* • Amy J. Keenum, DO, PharmD, *Health Literacy Editor*

Warfarin Therapy



Warfarin (brand name Coumadin) is a medication for people who are at increased risk of making blood clots due to an abnormal heart rhythm, certain replaced heart valves, and some clotting disorders. Warfarin is also used in patients who have had blood clots in the heart, brain, lungs, and legs to keep a clot from getting larger. The goal of warfarin treatment is to slow the clotting of blood, not to stop clotting. The effect of warfarin must be checked closely (i.e. at least once a month and sometimes more often) with blood testing. The blood test used to measure the time it takes for blood to clot is called a prothrombin time (PT) and is reported as the International Normalized Ratio (INR). If

the INR is below the target range there is a risk of clotting. If the INR is above the target range there is an increased risk of bleeding. A change in daily living, such as the type of foods we eat or drugs we take, also can affect how warfarin works in the body.

DO'S AND DONT'S FOR WARFARIN THERAPY:

Take Warfarin on a Schedule: Warfarin should be taken exactly as prescribed. Do not change the daily dose unless told to do so by your doctor or clinic. If a dose is missed, call your family doctor for advice.

Foods/ Vitamin K: Some foods, like those rich in Vitamin K as is found in green and leafy vegetables, can interfere with warfarin. Eat what you normally eat and consult your doctor before making any major changes in your diet.

Medications: Talk with your doctor before taking any new drugs, including over-the-counter drugs, herbals, vitamins, or any other products. Many drugs can change the level of warfarin in the blood; cause a PT and INR that is higher or lower than the target range.

Alcohol: Avoid alcohol. Alcohol can increase the risk of bleeding when on warfarin therapy.

Prevent Falls: Avoid doing things that have a risk of falling or injury such as contact sports. Remove loose rugs and consider grab bars in the home. Ensure good lighting inside and outside the home. Avoid walking on wet or polished floors, ice, or unfamiliar areas outside.

Travel: Carry your medications with you at all times and do not put them in a checked bag on a plane.

Pregnancy: Warfarin is not to be used during pregnancy. Tell your doctor if you are on warfarin and become pregnant.

Surgery/Dental & Other Medical Procedures: Tell all of your doctors and dentists that you are taking warfarin. If you are having a procedure you may need to stop taking warfarin.

Wear Medical Alert Tag: A medical alert tag will help in an emergency. The alert should include a list of major medical conditions and reason why warfarin is needed along with the name and phone number of an emergency contact.

MEDICAL CARE AND TREATMENT OPTIONS INCLUDE:

Should you have any signs or symptoms of a severe headache, numbness, weakness in any limb, trouble talking, chest pain, shortness of breath, redness, swelling, or pain in any limb, bruising, or bleeding (e.g. bleeding from the gums, blood in the urine or stool, nosebleed, or vomiting blood) while taking warfarin please tell your osteopathic family physician (D.O.) immediately. A change in the effectiveness of warfarin detected early by a good history, physical exam, and regular blood tests (PT with INR) can be treated. Your family doctor will help you decide which treatment approach will work best for you. In case of any emergency, you should call your physician or 911 right away.

Source(s): Coumadin.gov, NIH, and UpToDate.

The Osteopathic Family Physician Patient Education Handout is a public service of the ACOFP. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in many instances; however, they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis by a physician. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, ACOFP suggests that you consult your family physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with their patients. For additional patient related educational material please visit www.acofp.org.