

# Facts about Warfarin Therapy

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## Questions and answers about warfarin therapy

### What is warfarin?

Warfarin (Coumadin®, Jantoven®) is an oral blood thinner (anticoagulant) used to prevent the formation of blood clots in the blood vessels. Name brand Warfarin is commonly referred to as Coumadin® but also has other generic manufacturers.

### Why do physicians prescribe Warfarin?

Blood thinners are commonly used to prevent inappropriate blood clotting. This can occur most commonly in illnesses such as atrial fibrillation (heart rhythm abnormality), after heart valve replacement, and in patients that have had blood clots in the lungs and the deep veins of the legs or arms.

It is imperative that you know why you are taking warfarin, and that you have information regarding your warfarin dose and keep an accurate medication list with you at all times. MedicAlert® bracelets ([www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org)) are very helpful.

### How does warfarin work?

Warfarin affects the body's ability to form new clots by blocking the formation of vitamin K dependant clotting factors made by the liver. Taking vitamin K can reverse the effects of warfarin. Foods rich in vitamin K, like leafy or green vegetables, can affect warfarin if eaten in excessive amounts.

Patients are encouraged to maintain a health diet, which includes green leafy vegetables. Just be consistent with your diet. If you enjoy a salad with dinner, simply continue this routine.

### How much warfarin do I take?

Your physician will determine the appropriate dose of warfarin by testing your blood. This blood test is called a **protime (PT)** and is reported as **international normalized ratio (INR)**. You should be familiar with your INR range. The PT is a measure of how long it takes for your blood to clot. The higher your INR, the "thinner" your blood, and thus the longer it takes to clot. The INR range for most patients is 2.0 to 3.0. Your warfarin dose is adjusted to keep your INR range between 2.0 and 3.0.

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## **Blood testing (INR monitoring)**

Your blood will be tested on a monthly basis when the warfarin dose is stable. When warfarin is first initiated, you may require more frequent monitoring with dose adjustments based on the INR. Mark your calendar to remind you of your next warfarin test. Because many medications may alter the effects of warfarin on the blood, you may need to have your INR monitored more frequently when other medications are changed. Antibiotics may affect your INR (either up or down) and so more frequent blood monitoring may be required during the course of your antibiotic therapy.

Many illnesses may also affect your INR. Contact your physician if you have any serious illness that last more than 3-4 days.

## **When do I take my warfarin?**

It is best to take warfarin in the evening (after 5 PM). This allows your physician to adjust your warfarin dose the same day your INR is tested. Warfarin can be taken with or without food. Try to be consistent, and take your warfarin at the same time and every day.

## **What if I miss a dose?**

Do not double your dose the next day! Simply start back on your regular schedule the following day. If you miss more than one day, notify your physician.

## **What are the possible side effects of warfarin?**

The most common POTENTIAL side effect of warfarin use is related to bleeding. Many factors may affect your response to warfarin. Many of these factors are not initially apparent. Bleeding can occur in any organ. Consistent monitoring of your INR, and maintaining your INR in a therapeutic range is the most effective way to reduce your risk of bleeding while taking warfarin. Contact your physician immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Severe headache, dizziness or weakness
- Bleeding from a cut or shaving that does not stop after applying pressure for 10 minutes
- Any nose bleed that does not stop quickly with pressure
- Bleeding of the gums when brushing your teeth
- Throwing up or coughing up blood
- Passing bright red or black stool
- Unusual bruising of the skin for unknown reasons
- Red or dark brown urine
- More bleeding than usual when you begin your menstrual cycle, or unexpected bleeding from the vagina

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## What are the possible side effects of warfarin?

- Unusual pain or swelling
- After any fall or serious blow to the head
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Rarely, allergic skin reactions may occur. Call with any new skin rash.

## Can warfarin be used in pregnancy?

Warfarin cannot be taken during pregnancy. If you are or could become pregnant, discuss this with your physician. If you become pregnant, stop warfarin and contact your physician immediately.

## Can I use alcohol with warfarin?

It is best to avoid alcohol with warfarin, as alcohol can alter the effects of warfarin. Alcohol can also predispose you to stomach ulcers, which could be life threatening if they began to bleed. If you choose to use alcohol, limit consumption to no more than 1-2 drinks a day.

## What medications should I avoid?

Many prescription medications as well as OTC medications can affect your INR. In addition, many medications may affect your risk of bleeding indirectly.

Avoid anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen (Advil®), naproxen (Aleve®), aspirin (Excedrin®, Alka seltzer®), as well as H-2 antagonist like cimetidine (Tagamet®), ranitidine (Zantac®) and famotidine (Pepcid®). Also many herbal preparations can affect warfarin, and they should be avoided as well.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) use should not exceed 1000mg a day. That is equivalent to 2 extra strength Tylenol a day.

*Please check with your physician first before starting any new medications or OTC preparations.*

## What activities should I avoid?

While taking warfarin, any activity that that may result in a serious fall or injury should be avoided. Precautions should always be taken when using power tools and sharp instruments. Avoid power tools such as chainsaws and power saws.

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## What if I need dental work or a surgical procedure?

With the exception of routine teeth cleaning, contact your physician before having any dental procedures performed. Always notify your dentist or surgeon that you are taking warfarin. You may be asked to stop your warfarin briefly before such procedures. You will need to have your INR monitored closely before and after the procedure.

## What if I have questions?

Call your physician or pharmacist.

Other resources include:

- Utica Park Clinic Anticoagulation Clinic: **579-3943**
- Utica Rx pharmacist: **579-1616**

## What else should I do to monitor my medications?

Keep an accurate up to date medication list with you at all times. This should include vitamins and over the counter medications. Many lists are available, and you can create your own list. Make sure your family or your caregiver is aware of where your list is located.

## Keep warfarin out of the reach of children at all times.

A Utica Park Clinic list is also available and can be downloaded to your own PC. Once downloaded, the list can be updated after every physician appointment

See link: [http://www.uticaparkclinic.com/content/medication\\_safety.htm](http://www.uticaparkclinic.com/content/medication_safety.htm)

A weekly warfarin schedule can also be downloaded from the UPC web site

See link: [http://www.uticaparkclinic.com/content/medication\\_safety.htm](http://www.uticaparkclinic.com/content/medication_safety.htm)

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## Foods high in Vitamin K

<b>Vegetables:</b>
Avocado.
Broccoli.
Brussel sprouts.
Cabbage.
Green onions.
<b>Meats:</b>
Beef liver.
Pork liver.
<b>Leafy Greens:</b>
Collard greens.
Endive.
Iceberg lettuce.
Green leaf lettuces.
Kale.
Parsley.
Spinach.
Turnip greens.
<b>Other:</b>
Canola Oil.
Margarine.
Mayonnaise.
Soybean Oil.

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