



ANTICOAGULANT (Coumadin) THERAPY

Patient Information

How to take the medication

If your doctor has given you a prescription for an anti-coagulant, this is to prevent clots from forming in your blood. It is important to take the medication exactly as ordered, since too much of the drug can cause bleeding and too little can cause clotting. For this reason, you must have blood testing done periodically to ensure your blood is clotting properly. If it is not, your doctor will change the dosage. Here are important guidelines for taking your medication:

1. Take your anticoagulant at the same time of the day. If you are supposed to take it on alternate days, marking the calendar can help.
2. If you forget to take a dose, do not double up next time. Just take the next dose as scheduled. If you miss two doses, call your doctor.
3. Keep your appointments for blood tests.
4. Refill your prescription 1 week ahead so you do not run out.
5. Keep anticoagulants away from heat and cold.

Helping the medication work

Your diet, health, and other drugs can also affect the way anticoagulants work in your body. For this reason, follow these guidelines:

1. Eat only normal amounts of green leafy vegetables (spinach, broccoli, etc.). These foods have a high content of vitamin K, which helps your blood clot. However, too much vitamin K can interfere with the anticoagulant.
2. If you drink alcohol, limit the amount to one drink per day. Excessive alcohol can affect blood clotting.
3. **Do not take aspirin** or any drugs containing aspirin. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter drugs to be sure they do not contain aspirin or other substances that might affect blood clotting.
4. Do not take any supplements that contain vitamin K. If you take multivitamins or other supplements, check with your doctor or pharmacist to ensure they are safe.
5. Many prescription drugs can interfere with anticoagulants. Take other prescription medications only as prescribed by your doctor.
6. If you develop diarrhea, vomiting, or fever that lasts longer than 24 hours, call your doctor.

Safety first

While you are taking anticoagulant medication, your blood will clot more slowly if you are injured. Therefore, you should take precautions against even minor cuts and bruises. In addition, you must be alert for signs that you may be bleeding internally. The following safety measures will help prevent problems:

1. Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
2. Avoid putting toothpicks or other sharp objects in your mouth.
3. Protect your feet from injury. Do not walk barefoot, and do not trim corns or calluses yourself. See a podiatrist if necessary.
4. Inform all doctors (for example, dentist, gynecologist) that you are taking anticoagulants *before* receiving any treatment.
5. Avoid using cutting tools or other sharp objects that could result in injury.
6. Avoid rough sports.
7. Protect yourself from falling. Put a non-skid mat in your bathtub or shower, remove hazardous throw rugs, and wear low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
8. If you cut yourself, keep pressure on the injury for 10 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop, call your doctor immediately.
9. If you are bruised, draw a line around the margin. If the bruise enlarges, call your doctor.
10. Check urine and stools daily. Call the doctor if you see pink or red urine or black stools.
11. Call your doctor if you suddenly develop excessive nose-bleeds, bleeding gums, purplish or reddish spots on your skin, unusual vaginal bleeding or excessive menstrual flow, or bleeding hemorrhoids.
12. Carry either an identification card or a Medic-Alert bracelet at all times. It should include the name of the anticoagulant you are taking and your doctor's name and phone number.
13. If you are planning a long trip, inform your doctor so that he or she can arrange for the blood tests to be done while you are away.

For women

Coumadin is a drug that crosses the placenta and can cause serious birth defects. Therefore, you should take precautions to avoid pregnancy while on this drug. If you suspect that you are pregnant, notify your doctor **immediately**.

