

What is warfarin?

- Warfarin is an anticoagulant, a drug that prevents blood from clotting quickly.
- It is used to prevent blood clots or to allow your body to break down the clots that you have.
- It is a very effective drug, but it must be used with caution and needs regular monitoring with blood tests.
- Blood tests will be organized by the Thrombosis Clinic and then later by your General Practitioner (*Family Physician*).
- You can do the blood tests at an outpatient lab that is convenient for you.

Find out more at:
www.ThrombosisBC.ca

How do I take warfarin?

- Warfarin is taken once a day at approximately the same time each evening.
- It can be taken with or without food.
- If you forget a dose until the next day, do not take a double dose, but continue as usual.
- Remember to tell the Thrombosis Clinic or your doctor that you missed a dose the next time your blood is checked.
- If you take an extra dose in error, please call the clinic or your doctor. You may need a blood test sooner than planned.

What do I have to do while I am taking warfarin?

- You must get your blood checked regularly to make sure that you are taking the right dose for you.
- To know what dose is right for you, a blood test called INR (*International Normalized Ratio*) is done to measure how quickly the blood clots.
- The right dose is different for each person and can range from 0.5 mg to 20 mg daily.
- How often you need the INR blood test depends on how stable your dose is. Some people go once a week, others only need to go once a month. When warfarin is just being started, you may need to go more than once a week.

What is the INR? And what should my INR be?

- This is a blood test that measures how quickly your blood clots and tells the doctor how much warfarin you need.
- In people who are not taking warfarin, the INR is 1.0 to 1.2.
- For most people on warfarin, the INR should be between 2.0 and 3.0.
- Patients with mechanical heart valves may need their INR between 2.5 and 3.5.
- An INR below 2.0 means you need a higher dose of warfarin.
- An INR above 3.0 means you need a lower dose of warfarin.

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What are the side effects of warfarin?

- Side effects are very uncommon, but some people experience:
 - Hair loss or thinning
 - Diarrhea
 - Rash
- **Warfarin can cause birth defects if taken by an expectant mother. Women should use effective birth control when taking warfarin.**
- Rarely, patients develop more clots while taking warfarin. This is more likely if the INR is too low.

The major concern about warfarin is the risk of bleeding.

What about bleeding? What do I watch for?

- Usually, bleeding only occurs if you have a bleeding source, e.g., stomach ulcer, injury, trauma.
- Bleeding can occur spontaneously if your INR is too high (*higher than 5.0*).
- Older people are more likely to have serious bleeding.
- You need to call your doctor urgently or go to the emergency room if you notice any of the following:
 - Bright red blood in your stool, urine or vomit
 - Black, tarry, very foul smelling stools
 - Sudden onset of a new, severe headache, especially if you are nauseated or drowsy
 - Injured your head (*even if minor*) or have had a bad fall
 - Sudden swelling and severe pain in a joint
 - Large bruises or spontaneous bruising

How long do I have to take warfarin?

- This depends on why you are taking warfarin.
- Some people take it for 3 months while others take it for 6 months or longer, or even for life.
- Your doctor will help you decide how long to stay on warfarin.

What you eat or drink can affect how well warfarin works:

- The amount of vitamin K in your diet can affect how well warfarin is working.
- It is important to **keep your diet consistent** so that you are eating roughly the same amount of vitamin K. So avoid missing meals, eating irregularly, or making major dietary changes.
- Foods that are rich in vitamin K can lower the effect of warfarin:

Broccoli	Spinach	Kale
Brussels sprouts	Seaweed	Green tea

- You should not avoid these foods but eat them regularly and avoid eating large amounts at one time.
- Too much alcohol (*more than 2 drinks a day*), cranberry juice or grapefruit juice will increase the effect of warfarin.

Your dose of warfarin might need to change if you start or stop these drugs:

Antibiotics	Anti-seizure drugs	Amiodarone
Antidepressants	Antifungal drugs	Quinidine

Your dose of warfarin might be affected if you are also taking herbal and nutritional supplements:

Ginseng	St. John's wort
Gingko	Dong quai

- It is best to avoid herbal supplements because they can make it difficult to control your warfarin dose.
- **If in doubt, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.**