

COUMADIN/ WARFARIN

(AND WHAT IT DOES FOR ME)

Coumadin (generic: Warfarin)

Coumadin/Warfarin is a medication that will keep your blood from clotting. The drug is an anticoagulant. "Anti" means against and "coagulant" means to thicken into a gel or solid. Sometimes this drug is called a blood thinner. Think of syrup being poured from a can: it is sticky and thick and flows slowly. Coumadin/Warfarin helps your blood to flow easier and not clot.

Coumadin/ Warfarin will:



- Keep your blood from making clots.
 -
- Help your blood flow easily.

The reason you are taking Coumadin / Warfarin _____

Your INR range is. _____
(This will be explained on the next page)

YOUR "INR" RANGE

(LAB RATIO/ BLOOD CLOTTING TIME)

Your doctor decides how much Coumadin/Warfarin you need by testing your blood. The blood test the doctor will use is called an INR blood test. Sometimes this test is done at what is called a "Coumadin Clinic". This is an INR lab testing center or doctor's office that takes a sample of blood by using a lancet and measuring the INR by using a small machine that calculates your INR level immediately. If your doctor does not perform INR testing in the office, you will be sent to the laboratory that your insurance is assigned with and will be called by your doctor's office with the INR results.

The INR test measures how fast your blood is clotting and lets the doctor know if your dosage should change. If your INR blood test is too high (blood is too thin) you are at risk for bleeding problems and you may experience excessive bruising. If your INR is too low (blood is too thick), you are at risk for blood clots. Your doctor has decided on a range on the INR blood test that is right for you and your diagnosis.

When you first start taking Coumadin/Warfarin you may have your blood checked often. Once your INR level is in the "target range" and the correct dose is reached, this test will be done less often. Because your dose is based on the INR test, it is VERY important that you get your blood tested on the date and at the time that you are told.



HOW TO TAKE COUMADIN / WARFARIN

When Coumadin or Warfarin is first prescribed, you will be told how many milligrams you will have to take. Depending on your lab (INR) results, your milligram strength may change. Please take your pills as directed. You must take the pills only on the days that your doctor has told you too. The amount of Coumadin / Warfarin each person needs is different. You should always take your Coumadin / Warfarin in the evenings.

Coumadin / Warfarin can be taken with other medications. Never skip a dose. If you forget and miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you forget your Coumadin / Warfarin for an entire day, don't try to make up that dose by taking double the amount. Just take the usual dose the next day, and document the missed dose in your Coumadin diary. A daily pill box will help greatly in remembering your daily dose.



Coumadin / Warfarin come in different milligram strengths. You may be started on 5mg daily to start and then be adjusted from there after your first INR check. Coumadin comes in:
1mg, 2mg, 2.5mg, 3mg, 4mg, 5mg, 7.5mg and 10mg tablets.

HOW I CAN STAY SAFE TAKING COUMADIN / WARFARIN

You have read about Coumadin / Warfarin and how it can make your blood thinner and you can bleed much easier than before. Because of that, it is important for you to have some information about how to stay safe while you are taking Coumadin / Warfarin

You will need to be very careful with sharp objects and avoid some activities and sports that could cause injury. For example, it is not a good idea to take up rock climbing while you are on Coumadin / Warfarin. This is not to say that you cannot do the things that you like to do, but when doing them, you need to think about how you can protect yourself from injury. For example, if you like to work in the yard, be sure to wear sturdy gloves and shoes. Sports activities that would be safe for you include swimming and walking.

Whenever you cut yourself or have a bloody nose, it may be very difficult to get the bleeding to stop. First you will need to put pressure on the sight of bleeding to see if you can get it to stop on its own. If the bleeding won't stop, please get help immediately. Please call your doctors office first and they will either bring you into the office or tell you to go to the emergency room where the bleeding can be stopped. Please keep your physician informed. You will also be sent for a "stat " INR to determine how thin your blood has become. (STAT is a term used to determine how quickly the results are needed, usually within 4 hrs.). Sometimes, if your INR is very high, Vitamin K will be prescribed by a physician either orally or by injection. This makes your blood clot quickly when necessary. If you take a hard fall, please call your physicians office and let them know. You may have a deep purple bruise's when this happens, and you should have your INR checked to determine how thin your blood is. If you take a fall and hurt your head area it is possible to have bleeding under the skull. Please call your doctor if this occurs even if you aren't bleeding.

Please talk to your doctor about wearing a "Medical alert" bracelet. If you are badly injured and unable to speak, the bracelet would tell health care providers that you are on Coumadin / Warfarin. This is very important because it will let the medical providers know that your blood is thin due to medication and will treat your wounds differently.



POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF COUMADIN / WARFARIN

Side effects with Coumadin / Warfarin are not common. Most side effects relate to how the medicine works. To lower the risk of bleeding, your blood Coumadin / Warfarin level will be kept within a range that is right for you. Minor bleeding can occur even when your INR blood test is in range. For example, you may notice small bruises or slight gum bleeding when you brush your teeth. Some people may experience hair loss or skin rashes, but this is very rare. If you have something abnormal that you feel may be caused by your medication, please contact your doctor.

Slight bleeding- you may notice from time to time.

- Gum bleeding while brushing teeth
- Occasional nosebleeds
- Easy bruising
- Bleeding after a minor cut that stops within a few minutes
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal.

Major Bleeding- call your doctors office or go directly to the emergency room if you experience any of the following:



- Red, dark, coffee or cola colored urine
- Bowel movements that are red or look like tar
- Too much bleeding from the gums or nose
- Throwing up coffee colored or bright red substance
- Coughing up red-tinged secretions
- Severe pain (such as headache or stomachache.)
- Sudden appearance of bruises for no reason
- A cut that will not stop bleeding within 10 minutes
- A serious fall
- Hitting your head.

USING OTHER MEDICATIONS

When Coumadin or Warfarin is taken with other medicines, it can change the way other medications work. Other medicines can also change the way Coumadin / Warfarin works. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO INFORM YOUR DOCTOR OF ALL OTHER MEDICATIONS THAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY TAKING. INCLUDING OVER THE COUNTER VITAMINS, MEDICATION OR HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS.**



Any product containing **ASPIRIN** lessens the blood's ability to form clots and adds to the effect of Coumadin / Warfarin. NEVER take aspirin without telling your doctor. If you take one aspirin daily, your dose should not exceed 325mg daily and only if your doctor tells you to do so.

- **Products that contain Aspirin:** Excedrin, Alka-seltzer, Ascriptin, Bayer, Bufferin, Ecotrin, Empirin, Nyquil, Pepto Bismol and Percodan.

*People who are prescribed the medication, **Amiodarone** will need to be **very** cautious about combining the two medications. You will have to have your INR checked more frequently. Only your physician will be able to determine whether it is safe for you to take both medications in conjunction with each other.

ANTIBIOTICS AND COUMADIN / WARFARIN

Anytime you are prescribed an antibiotic for an infection or for dental work, you need to call and let your doctor know. Antibiotics make the Coumadin / Warfarin work too WELL and can make your blood too thin. You will be instructed to cut back on your Coumadin through the course of the antibiotic and have your INR checked frequently.

FLU VACCINE AND COUMADIN / WARFARIN

Flu vaccines can interfere with your Coumadin / Warfarin and how well it works. It can make your blood too thin and you will need to have your INR checked more frequently until your INR is stable again. Please let your doctor know when you get a flu shot.

MEDICATIONS THAT ARE SAFE TO TAKE:

- Tylenol/ acetaminophen. No more than 4 of the 325mg tablets or 2 of the 500mg tablets,
- Laxatives: Milk of Magnesia or Colace
- Vitamins: **consult your doctor regarding any over the counter vitamins.**
- Cold or allergy: Allerest, Contact, Orenex, Sinutab

DIET FOR PATIENTS ON COUMADIN / WARFARIN

(Vitamin K in the diet)



The foods that you consume can affect how well Coumadin / Warfarin works for you. The most important thing to remember is to eat what you normally eat and not make any major changes in your diet without letting your doctor's office know. Do not go on a weight loss plan without first consulting your doctor. Do not add any vitamins or supplements to your diet without first checking with your doctor. For example: Ensure or Slim Fast.

MOST IMPORTANTLY is your food intake and Coumadin / Warfarin and how they work together. Your intake of any foods containing high amounts of vitamin K is vital to a stable INR level. Vitamin K is the vitamin in your system that makes your blood clot. Since you are being given Coumadin / Warfarin to STOP your body from producing vitamin K, it is not good to eat food with a high concentration of vitamin K.

The highest amount of Vitamin K is found in green and leafy vegetables like broccoli, greener colored lettuce, cabbage and spinach. The main thing to remember is-**Keep your diet consistent!** You can eat vegetables with Vitamin K as long as you eat the same amount that you usually did prior to Coumadin / Warfarin. Any deviation from the usual amount of Vitamin K can alter your blood clotting time, making it thicker. **VITAMIN K MAKES THE BLOOD THICKER.**

Please call your doctors office if you are unable to eat for several days, for whatever reason. Also call if you have stomach problems, vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than one day. These problems could affect your Coumadin dosage.

Foods high in Vitamin K:

- o **Vegetables:** Broccoli, Cabbage, Brussel sprouts, Green onions and Avacado
- o **Leafy Greens:** Iceberg lettuce, green leaf lettuces, Spinach, Turnip greens, Parsley, Kale, Collards greens and Endive.
- o **Meats:** Beef liver, Pork liver
- o **Other:** Mayonnaise, Margarine, Canola Oil, Soybean Oil

Good Book regarding foods and Coumadin: The Coumadin Cookbook:
Written by: Desmarais ,Rene M.D., Golden, Greg, RCS, and Beynon, Gail

HOW TAKING COUMADIN / WARFARIN CHANGES MY LIFESTYLE

Although Coumadin / Warfarin is a medication that can have some serious side effects, you do not need to worry about making significant changes to your lifestyle.

Your INR level can be different from someone else that you know who is on Coumadin, so please listen to your physician and the advice given to you about **YOUR** Coumadin and foods that are o.k. for you to eat.



Stay active! Exercise is important to your health. Think about the sports and activities you like doing. Do they put you at risk for injury? If they do, try another sport or activity and use protection while participating in it. You should have a first aid kit with you with gauze and bandages "just in case".



Keep your diet balanced! Read carefully the information in this pamphlet on diet, especially the foods high in Vitamin K. Ask questions if you do not understand something, or educate yourself on Vitamin K by researching online by typing in Vitamin K and Coumadin or go to your nearest library and look in the health or nutrition section.



Alcohol can affect your Coumadin / Warfarin dosage but it does not mean that you must avoid alcohol all together. It is suggested that alcohol intake be limited to 1-2 drinks per day. Most importantly is that you keep to your pattern and not make any major adjustments to your alcohol intake. Serious problems can occur with alcohol and Coumadin / Warfarin when you drink in excess of more than 2-3 drinks a day or when you change your "usual" pattern. Saturday night binges would not be good for you-drink **ONLY** what you usually do on any day of the week.