

WARFARIN INFORMATION SHEET

Warfarin is an **anticoagulant**. This means that it suppresses the normal blood clotting systems, preventing the formation of harmful blood clots within the blood stream. Unfortunately, it can also result in prolonged bleeding and needs to be carefully monitored by regular blood tests. These are called 'INR' (International Normalised Ratio) tests. They measure how long it takes your blood to clot compared to how long it should normally take. The results of the INR tests will determine the dose of Warfarin you need to take and your surgery will advise you on the correct dose.

Because your Warfarin dose can change after an INR test, you will need different strengths of Warfarin tablets to keep at home and these are illustrated below. We suggest you keep this coloured guide to remind you which tablets are which.

In the UK, the strengths and colours of Warfarin tablets are:

.....

IMPORTANT INFORMATION



CUT OUT AND KEEP

.....

Having Your INR Checked At The Practice

A finger-prick blood sample is taken and tested on a strip which is inserted into a monitor (called CoaguChek). The monitor will then calculate your current INR level.

Your INR level is then entered into a dedicated software programme (called RATi) on the computer which will calculate which dose of Warfarin you should be taking and when you should have your next INR check.

A result will be printed and given to you with all the relevant details and instructions.

This is all done in your appointment.

If you have your INR checked at home, the Community Nurse will take the monitor out to your home and take the finger-prick blood test. They will take the monitor back to the practice to enter your INR level onto the computer to get your result. They will contact you with the result and post the paper copy out to you.

You will be given an anticoagulant dosing sheet printed from RATi each time you have your INR test. Read this carefully and always carry it with you.

Always carry a Warfarin warning card. If you don't have a Warfarin card then please ask the practice for one.

When to avoid Warfarin

Warfarin can affect the development of a baby in early pregnancy, so it is not routinely used during pregnancy, breast feeding or if you are trying for a baby.

Adverse Effects

The most serious adverse effect of Warfarin is bleeding. You MUST seek medical attention and arrange an urgent test if you experience any of the following:

- Bleeding gums
- Passing blood in your urine or faeces
- Passing black faeces
- Severe bruising
- Long nose bleeds (lasting longer than 10 minutes)
- Blood in your vomit or coughing up blood
- Unusual headaches
- (In women) heavy or increased bleeding during your period, or any other bleeding from the vagina.

You must seek immediate medical attention if you:

- Are involved in a major accident
- Receive a significant blow to the head
- Are unable to stop any bleeding from cuts, wounds or shaving

Less Common Adverse Effects

Less common adverse effects of Warfarin include:

- Rashes
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea

Interactions with Other Medicines

When two or more medicines are taken at the same time, the effects of one of the medicines can be altered by the other. This is known as a drug interaction. Warfarin can interact with many medicines. This includes

- Common medicines such as some painkillers and some antibiotics
- Some Vitamin supplements
- Some Herbal medicines (such as St. John's Wort)
- Some Creams (such as Daktacort)
- Some Oral Gels (such as Daktarin)

The above list is not exhaustive. If you want to check that your medicines are safe to take with Warfarin, ask your GP or LOCAL PHARMACIST, or read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine. It is safer to buy medicine from a chemist where the pharmacist is available than buying over the counter medicines in a supermarket.

Do not start taking any new medicine or supplement without checking with your GP or pharmacist.

Aspirin and other Painkillers

If you are on Warfarin:

- Do not start taking Aspirin or drugs that contain Aspirin
- Do not take Ibuprofen, Diclofenac or Naproxen
- You can take Paracetamol but do not take more than the recommended dose. Be aware that Paracetamol 'Plus' contains Aspirin.

Interactions with food

Some foods affect the level of Warfarin in your body and changing your diet suddenly can affect your Warfarin levels.

- Foods that contain Vitamin K will lower your INR and increase the risk of blood clotting. This includes leafy green vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, spinach and brussels sprouts. These foods are good for you so there is no need to avoid them but you need to keep your intake consistent from day to day.
- It is recommended that you avoid cranberry juice as it increases the risk of bleeding.
- If you have any specific questions or need further advice, ask your GP or practice nurse.

Interactions with Alcohol

- It is dangerous to binge drink or get drunk while taking Warfarin. Doing this may increase the effect of Warfarin and so increase the risk of bleeding.
- Do not drink more than 3 units of alcohol a day if you are a man, or 2 units a day if you are a woman. It is not safe to save up units to have on one day.
- One unit is roughly equivalent to half a pint of beer or lager, a single measure (25ml) of a spirit such as vodka, or a small glass (125ml) of wine.
- People with liver disease who are taking Warfarin should not drink alcohol.

Taking your Warfarin

Warfarin is taken once a day. It is important to take your tablet(s) at the same time each day washed down with a full glass of water.

Missed Doses

If you forget to take your dose of Warfarin but remember within three hours, you can still take that dose.

If it is more than three hours late, you should not take it. Make a note on your RATi dosage sheet that you missed a dose and take a normal dose the next day at the usual time. Never take a double dose to catch up.

If you are not sure what to do if you have missed a dose, ask your GP.

Extra Doses or Wrong Doses

If you accidentally take an extra dose or take the wrong dose of Warfarin, contact your GP for advice and make a note on your RATi dosage sheet.

Important Information About Warfarin

- Never take more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that you or someone else has taken an overdose of this medicine go to the Accident and Emergency Department of your local hospital at once. Remember to take your most recent RATi dosage sheet with you.
- This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.
- **Never stop taking your warfarin without consulting your GP**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

What happens if I need an operation or teeth taken out?

Due to the risk of bleeding, your dose of Warfarin may have to be lowered or stopped a few days before an operation or removal of teeth. You must tell your surgeon or dentist you are on Warfarin.

What do I do if I have a nosebleed?

If you have a nosebleed, carry out normal first aid:

- Lean your head forward
- Pinch just below the bridge of your nose firmly for at least 10 minutes

If the nosebleed lasts longer than 15 minutes or you have regular nosebleeds, contact the surgery to get your INR checked.

Can I have normal vaccinations?

Yes. Your GP or practice nurse will take extra precautions to avoid the risk of bleeding, such as applying firm pressure to the injection site for 10 minutes afterwards.

Can I play sports?

Yes, you should try to lead as normal a life as possible but due to risk of bleeding:

- Sports such as football, rugby, cricket and hockey are best avoided if played competitively
- Martial arts and kickboxing must be avoided

Non-contact sports such as running, athletics, cycling and racquet sports can be played. Wear the right protective clothing, such as cycle helmets and knee padding.

Can I still go on holiday?

If you are going on holiday, either in this country or abroad, tell your GP and arrange to have your INR checked just before you go. You may need to arrange to have your INR checked wherever you are going. Remember to take your most recent RATi dosage sheet with you.

Make sure you have enough Warfarin tablets to last your trip.

Finally

Never be afraid to ask any of the practice nurses or doctors for advice in relation to any queries or problems you encounter while taking Warfarin. We are here to provide a quality service and guidance when required.

Never stop taking your warfarin without consulting your GP.