

A Patient's Guide to Oral Anticoagulation Therapy



Anticoagulation (blood thinning) can seem frightening, but when managed properly is safe and effective. The information found here is sure to create as many questions as it answers. Don't hesitate to contact your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns about your blood thinning therapy.

- My prescribed blood thinner is _____ (brand name _____)
- The reason I am taking a blood thinner is _____
- My dose is _____mg _____
- I take my blood thinner _____time(s) daily, at/in the _____
- My anticoagulation provider is _____and can be contacted at _____
- My designated laboratory test is _____ INR, _____not required

If I am taking warfarin:

- My goal INR range is _____ to _____
- My next INR test is _____
- My warfarin tablet strength is _____ and the tablet color is _____
- My warfarin dose is:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Important things to remember while taking a blood thinner:

1. Take your medicine at the same time every day
2. Watch for unusual bruising/bleeding; if you notice this, report it to your anticoagulation provider right away
3. Let your provider know if anything with your health, medicines, or diet changes
4. Make sure you always have enough medicine so that you don't run out
5. Closely follow directions from your anticoagulation and healthcare providers

Anticoagulation Therapy

Anticoagulant medicines are commonly known as “blood thinners.” These medicines do not actually “thin” your blood, but they can prevent blood clots from forming or may prevent worsening of existing blood clots.

Some health conditions cause blood clots to form more easily, which may require use of a blood thinner. These conditions may include:

- Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – blood clots in the leg(s)
- Pulmonary Embolism (PE) – blood clots in the lung(s)
- Stroke prevention due to irregular heart beat (known as Atrial Fibrillation or A Fib)
- Stroke prevention due to artificial (mechanical or replacement tissue) heart valves
- Other conditions as described by your healthcare provider

Anticoagulation (Blood Thinning) Treatment Goals

- Stop an existing blood clot from growing and allow your body to heal from it
- Prevent formation of a new blood clot
- Avoid or lessen the long-term effects caused by blood clots

Types of Anticoagulants

There are different types of blood thinners. Each one works on different parts of the clotting process to slow clotting.

Warfarin (brand names Coumadin or Jantoven)

Warfarin is a medicine that is taken by mouth in order to prevent harmful blood clots from forming and growing. It works by blocking vitamin K, which is required by the body to make substances that form a clot. It begins working in the body several days after you begin taking it regularly. Warfarin requires that you get regular blood tests to ensure safe and effective use. Many medicines interact with warfarin. Dietary considerations are also important.

Apixaban (Eliquis), rivaroxaban (Xarelto), edoxaban (Savaysa), betrixaban (Bevyxxa)

These medicines are tablets taken by mouth to stop the function of factor Xa in the clotting process. These medicines begin working in your body 2 to 4 hours after they are taken, but this may be different for each person. Regular blood tests and dietary restrictions are not necessary for these medicines.

Dabigatran (Pradaxa)

Dabigatran is a capsule taken by mouth that stops the function of thrombin, another major part of the clotting process. This medicine starts working 30 minutes to 2 hours after it is taken, but this may be different for each person. Regular blood tests and dietary restrictions are not necessary for this medicine.

How do I take my blood thinner?

Keeping track of how you take your blood thinner is one of the most important things you can do. You should take your medicine at the same time every day. Do NOT try to correct a missed dose by taking an extra dose. Write down when you missed your dose and when you took it. If in doubt, call your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider. Instructions on how to take your blood thinner can be found on page 5.

- If you take warfarin, different strengths may be required on different days of the week. You should take your medicine at the same time every day, preferably in the evening. [Evening dosing will allow your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider to adjust your dose if needed.] If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it's the same day.
- If you take one of the other blood thinners, you will take the same dose each day. Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time, and do not take extra doses.

Do blood thinners have side effects that I need to know about?

When taking a blood thinner, you should watch for signs of bleeding or clotting.

If you notice any of these signs, call your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider:

- Easy Bruising
- Prolonged bleeding from cuts, your nose, or while brushing your teeth
- Reflux or heartburn, especially if you are taking dabigatran (Pradaxa)

If you have any of the following signs, seek emergency medical attention (dial 911 or go to the nearest emergency room), as it could indicate a very serious problem:

- Vomiting or coughing blood, or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Blood in the urine
- Bright red or dark tarry/sticky blood in the stool
- Sudden, severe abdominal pain
- Sudden bruising not caused by an injury (or other known reason)
- New, rapid or unusual heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Pain or swelling in any part of your leg (if concerned about blood clots in the leg)
- Sudden tiredness, fatigue, or shortness of breath (if concerned about blood clots in the lung)
- Sudden confusion
- A fall, especially if you have bruising, dizziness, headache, weakness, or hit your head
- Signs of a serious allergic reaction
 - Rash, itching, swelling – especially of the face/tongue/throat
 - Trouble breathing
- Signs or Symptoms of a stroke
 - Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, or leg
 - Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding
 - Sudden trouble seeing out of one or both eyes
 - Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
 - Sudden severe headache with no known reason

How do I manage the side effects of blood thinners?

- If you get cut, apply direct pressure. Your blood will clot, but it will take longer than usual to stop bleeding. ***For any serious cut, injury, or bleeding that won't stop after 15-20 minutes of direct pressure, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.***
- Inspect yourself regularly for bruises. Contact the clinic or your doctor if you have large bruises that don't appear to be healing.
- Take care when shaving. If you get nicks and cuts while shaving, using an electric razor may be better.
- Wear gloves while doing yard work or when handling sharp objects. Take care when placing your hands into places such as tool boxes, dishwashers, trash cans, or other containers where you may not be able to see sharp objects.
- If you get a nose bleed, lean your head slightly forward and pinch your nostrils just below the bone. Pack your nose with something absorbent like a paper towel or cloth. Adding a cool compress to the back of the neck may also help. ***If the bleeding lasts longer than 15-20 minutes, go to the emergency room.***

Who should know about my blood thinning therapy?

All of your healthcare providers, including dentists, pharmacists, and emergency personnel, should be aware that you are on a blood thinner. This is especially important as blood thinning therapy can affect other health conditions and the way your medicines work. You should carry a current medicine list in your purse or wallet. Consider wearing a medical bracelet to let health care personnel know you take a blood thinner.

What should I do if I have a surgery or procedure planned?

Certain surgeries or procedures can increase the risk of bleeding when taking blood thinners, so careful management of your medicine around the time of the procedure may be needed. Your provider will tell you if you need to stop taking your

blood thinner before the procedure, and if so when to restart it after the procedure. Tell your provider when you have a surgery or procedure planned. (It may take several days for your blood clotting to return to normal after stopping the medicine for a procedure.)

What about pregnancy and blood thinners?

Some blood thinners may be harmful to an unborn baby. If you are of childbearing age you should use contraception while on a blood thinner. If you plan to become pregnant or are pregnant, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

What about other medicines?

Many medicines can interact with blood thinners. Before a provider stops or starts a new medicine, remind them that you are on a blood thinner. **Please also remember to call your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider if you start or stop a medicine, or if the dose of a medicine changes.** If you get your medicines filled at several pharmacies (i.e. mail order and a local pharmacy, or VA pharmacy) be sure all of your pharmacists know you are on a blood thinner.

Certain medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter, may affect your risk of bleeding or clotting while taking a blood thinner. **Contact your provider right away if you start or change any of these medicines:**

- **Antibiotics**
- **Heart medicines**
- **Antidepressant medicines**
- **Steroids (prednisone, methylprednisolone, hydrocortisone, etc.)**
- **Vitamins and supplements**

Pain relievers such as **Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), and aspirin (Bayer and others) increase your bleeding risk.** Many over-the-counter allergy and cold medicines may also contain pain relievers – ask your pharmacist if you aren't sure. **Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is the best choice for pain relief.**

Should I be worried about traveling while on a blood thinner?

The risk for developing blood clots while traveling is low, but can increase if sitting for longer periods of time (especially for more than 4 hours). **It is important to get up and move around as much as you can while traveling, and drink plenty of water.** Avoid crossing your legs or consuming alcohol, caffeine, or sleeping pills, as these can also increase your risk for a blood clot. If you have any questions or concerns about traveling, call your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

How to take and store your blood thinner

Generic & Brand Name	Tablet Strengths Available	Tablet Description	Number of times taken daily	Special Instructions	Instructions for Storage
Apixaban (Eliquis)	2.5mg Tablet	Yellow, Round <u>Imprint</u> Side 1: 893 Side 2: 2 ½	Twice	Can be taken with or without food. Tablets may be crushed and mixed with apple juice or applesauce if unable to swallow tablet whole.	Store at room temperature (68-77°F), in a dry place.
	5mg Tablet	Pink, Oval <u>Imprint</u> Side 1: 894 Side 2: 5			
Dabigatran (Pradaxa)	75mg Capsule	White <u>Imprint</u> : R75	Twice	Take with a full glass of water. Can be taken with or without food. Swallow capsules whole; do not break, open, or chew.	Store at room temperature (58 to 86°F), in a dry place. Once the package is opened, the medicine must be used within 4 months.
	110mg Capsule	Light Blue <u>Imprint</u> : R110			
	150mg Capsule	Light Blue and White <u>Imprint</u> : R150			
Edoxaban (Savaysa)	15mg Tablet	Orange, Round <u>Imprint</u> : DSC L15	Once	Can be taken with or without food.	Store at room temperature (68-77°F), in a dry place.
	30mg Tablet	Pink, Round <u>Imprint</u> : DSC L30			
	60mg Tablet	Yellow, Round <u>Imprint</u> : DSC L60			
Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)	10mg Tablet	Light Red, Round <u>Imprint</u> : Side 1: 10 Side 2: Xa	Once or twice (should be taken with evening meal if taken once daily)	15mg and 20mg tablets should be taken with food. 10mg tablets can be taken with or without food. Tablets may be crushed and mixed with water or applesauce if unable to swallow tablet whole.	Store at room temperature (58 to 86°F), in a dry place.
	15mg Tablet	Red, Round <u>Imprint</u> : Side 1: 15 Side 2: Xa			
	20mg Tablet	Dark Red, Triangle <u>Imprint</u> : Side 1: 20 Side 2: Xa			
Warfarin (Coumadin or Jantoven)	1, 2, 2.5, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.5, and 10mg tablets	See page 7	Once	Warfarin doses are based on INR test results and other factors. Be sure to follow your provider's instructions on how to take your warfarin. Take the daily dose at night.	Store at room temperature (58 to 86°F) in a dry place.

Warfarin

While taking warfarin (Coumadin or Jantoven), there are certain things you should know. Please read the below information and contact your anticoagulation (blood thinner) provider if you have further questions.

Need for frequent monitoring of warfarin

Each person's body handles warfarin differently. Warfarin can be affected by many things such as illness, diet, and other medicines or supplements. Too much warfarin can lead to a greater risk of bleeding and too little warfarin can lead to a greater risk of a blood clot. Regular monitoring of warfarin (using blood tests) helps keep warfarin safe and effective for use.

How will I know if the warfarin is working correctly?

A blood test, called an INR, measures your response to warfarin. Each person has their own dose of warfarin that works for them. The INR blood test is the only way of knowing if your dose is right for you. It is important to know your INR goal and most recent test result in case of a medical emergency. The INR can be measured by taking a drop of blood from your finger, or by drawing blood from a vein. The INR only measures your response to warfarin, not to any other blood thinning medicine.

How often do I need to have my INR checked?

When starting warfarin, you may need to have your INR checked once or twice a week, until your provider determines what your usual dose should be. The time between INR tests will then depend on your previous INR levels and how stable your INR is. The longest recommended time between INR checks is about every 4 to 6 weeks. Some people may need to be checked more often depending on medical conditions and other changes that may occur.

How do I take my warfarin?

- If you take warfarin, different strengths may be required on different days of the week. **You should take your medicine at the same time every day, preferably in the evening.** (Evening dosing will allow your anticoagulation provider to adjust your dose, if needed.) If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember, as long as it's the same day.
- Each tablet strength of warfarin is a different color. **If the COLOR of your tablet CHANGES unexpectedly, please contact your healthcare provider or pharmacist immediately.** Changes in the shape or size of the tablet is okay.
- **Make sure you always have enough warfarin so that you don't run out.** Be sure you have enough medicine, especially when traveling, as missing just one dose can be dangerous.
- **DO NOT suddenly stop taking your prescribed blood thinner,** as this could lead to a blood clot, stroke, or heart attack.

Tablet color	Pink	Purple	Green	Tan	Blue	Peach	Teal	Yellow	White
Tablet strength	1 mg	2 mg	2.5 mg	3 mg	4 mg	5 mg	6 mg	7.5 mg	10 mg

Is it true that I can't eat green vegetables while on warfarin therapy?

Certain foods, particularly green leafy vegetables, contain high amounts of vitamin K which may reverse the effects of warfarin and increase your risk of having a blood clot. However, you should not avoid foods which contain vitamin K. **You should eat a consistent amount of vitamin K containing foods on a regular basis and maintain a healthy diet.** (See the last page for "Vitamin K Content of Common Foods" to help you in determining portion sizes.)

The highest dietary sources of Vitamin K are:

Broccoli	Endive
Brussel Sprouts	Kale/Spinach
Green Soybeans	V8 Juice
Cabbage	Mustard & Dandelion Greens
Turnip greens	Some energy and Protein Bars
Green onion (top & bulb)	Lettuces (Boston, bibb, butterhead, romaine & green leaf)
Swiss Chard	Collards

Can I still have a glass of wine or a beer?

Having more than 3 alcoholic drinks in a day can cause your INR to go up and increases your risk of bleeding. If you choose to drink alcohol, you should limit your daily intake.

What about Cranberry or Grapefruit Juice?

Cranberry juice, if taken moderately (less than 8 ounces a day), should not affect blood thinners. Grapefruit juice or grapefruit can affect blood thinners. Please tell your anticoagulation provider if you routinely enjoy eating grapefruit or drinking the juice. Other citrus fruits are fine to eat while on a blood thinner.

Vitamin K Content of Common Foods (not all inclusive, Listed as H = high, M = medium, L = low)

Food	Portion size	Vit K content	Food	Portion size	Vit K content
Asparagus	7 spears	M	Lettuce bibb	1 ¾ cups	H
Avocado	1 small	M	Lettuce red leaf	1 ¾ cups	H
Beans (green)	¾ cup	L	Lettuce iceberg	5 leaves	M
Broccoli	½ Cup	H	Mushroom	1 ½ cups	L
Brussel sprouts	5 sprouts	H	Mustard greens	1 ½ cups	H
Cabbage	1 ½ cups	H	Onion		L
Cabbage (red)	1 ½ cups	M	Parsley	1 ½ cups	H
Carrot	2/3 cup	L	Peas (green)	2/3 cup	M
Cauliflower	1 cup	L	Pepper (green)		L
Celery	2 ½ stalks	L	Pickle (dill)		M
Collard greens	½ cup	H	Potato		L
Corn	2/3 cup	L	Pumpkin		L
Cucumber (no peel)	1 cup	L	Sauerkraut	½ cup	L
Eggplant	1 ¼ cups	L	Spinach (raw leaf)	1 ½ cups	H
Endive (raw)	2 cups	H	Tomato		L
Green Scallion	2/3 cups	H	Turnip greens	1 ½ cups	H
Kale (raw)	¾ cup	H	Watercress	3 cups	H
Fats and Dressings			Meat		
Food	Portion size	Vit K content	Food	Portion size	Vit K content
Margarine	7 Tbsp (1/3 cup)	M	Beef		L
Mayonnaise	7 Tbsp	H	Chicken		L
Oils: Canola	7 Tbsp	H	Ham		L
Salad	7 Tbsp	H	Mackerel		L
Soybean	7 Tbsp	H	Pork		L
Olive	7 Tbsp	M	Shrimp		L
Corn	7 Tbsp	L	Tuna		L
Peanut	7 Tbsp	L	Turkey		L
Sesame	7 Tbsp	L			
Sunflower	7 Tbsp	L			
Fruit					
Food	Portion size	Vit K content	Food	Portion size	Vit K content
Apple (no peel)		L	Grapefruit		L
Banana		L	Lemon		L
Blueberries		L	Orange		L
Cantaloupe		L	Peach		L
Grapes		L			
Dairy Products/Eggs/Beverages			Grain Products		
Food	Portion size	Vit K content	Food	Portion size	Vit K content
Butter/Cheese		L	Bagel plain		L
V8 Juice		H	Bread		L
Coffee/Tea		L	Cereal		L
Eggs		L	Flour		L
Fruit Juices		L	Oatmeal		L
Milk		L	Rice		L
Sour Cream		L	Spaghetti		L
Yogurt		L			