

Medication tips for patients

Things to know if you are taking warfarin (Coumadin®)

What is warfarin?

Warfarin (Coumadin®) has been prescribed to you if you are at risk of forming blood clots, which can cause serious health problems if they block the flow of blood to the heart or brain. It works by lowering the activity of vitamin K, which the body uses in its blood clotting reactions. Your health provider monitors warfarin function using laboratory tests, such as the International Normalized Ratio (INR), to ensure that it remains within a proper, safe range. Outside of this range, you may either be at risk of developing blood clots, or of having a bleed or hemorrhage.

What can I do to help?

- take your prescribed dose of warfarin at the same time each day
- follow your health team's advice on having your INR monitored on a regular basis
- monitor your intake of the foods, beverages, and supplements noted below:

Vitamin K

- vitamin K can interact with warfarin – sudden increases can decrease the effect of warfarin, while sudden decreases in vitamin K may have the opposite effect
- keep your vitamin K intake consistent by limiting yourself to 1 serving/day of foods high in vitamin K (eg. kale, spinach, turnip greens, collards, swiss chard, parsley, and mustard greens), and 3 servings/day of foods moderately high in vitamin K (eg. brussel sprouts, broccoli, green leaf lettuce, endive lettuce, romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, red cabbage, asparagus, soybeans, garbanzo beans, lentils, and liver)

Beverages

- check with your health team, as alcohol, mango juice and cranberry juice can increase the effect of warfarin and bring about the risk of bleeding

Dietary and Herbal Supplements

- check with your health team about the following supplements, which may affect your INR: arnica, bilberry, butcher's broom, cats' claw, dong quai, feverfew, forskolin, garlic, ginger, ginkgo, horse chestnut, inositol hexaphosphate, licorice, melilot (sweet clover), pau d'arco, red clover, St. John's wort, sweet woodruff, turmeric, willow bark, wheat grass, and vitamin E

Antibiotics

- check with your health team, as some antibiotics can lower vitamin K levels in your body or interfere with warfarin