

WARFARIN

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If you have a high risk of developing blood clots that may lead to heart attack, stroke or Peripheral Artery Disease, you may be prescribed Warfarin. You may also be familiar with its brand name, Coumadin.

Warfarin is a high alert medication, which means if you do not take it exactly as prescribed, it may cause illness or injury.

To understand how Warfarin works, let's look at how blood clots affect your body.

When you get a cut, materials in your blood quickly join together forming a clot over the injury. This stops the bleeding and allows the wound to heal.

However, sometimes blood clots can form in your blood vessels and can cause potentially dangerous health problems.

Warfarin can help stop new clots from forming, prevent existing clots from getting bigger, and prevent clots from breaking off the artery walls and traveling through the body.

Warfarin is a very powerful medication. If you take too much Warfarin, you can bleed easily. If you take too little Warfarin, blood clots can form.

Warfarin comes in a tablet. Your healthcare provider will decide on the dose of Warfarin that is right for you based on a regular blood test called an International Normalized Ratio, or INR.

Some people should not take Warfarin. Do not take Warfarin if you are allergic to the ingredients in it.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have bleeding problems.

If you are pregnant, or planning to get pregnant, do not take Warfarin. If you are breastfeeding, talk to your healthcare provider about whether Warfarin is right for you.

Before taking Warfarin, tell your healthcare provider if you have a history of: liver or kidney problems, bleeding problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, or recent eye or brain injury.

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Let all of your healthcare providers know you are taking Warfarin, including your dentist. You may need to stop taking your medication a few days before your appointment.

In case of emergency, wear an alert bracelet and carry a wallet card to let all healthcare providers know you are taking Warfarin.

Some side effects of Warfarin include: minor bleeding from your nose or gums, bruises that form easily, unusual hemorrhoid bleeding, heavier than normal menstrual bleeding, nausea and vomiting, bloating or gas, or a change in your sense of taste.

If you do notice any of these side effects, contact your healthcare provider about how to manage them.

Eating grapefruit, or drinking grapefruit juice, while taking Warfarin can increase your side effects. If you do eat grapefruit, eat or drink about the same amount every day to avoid an increase in side effects.

If you have an allergic reaction like: trouble breathing, hives, or swelling of your face or throat, call 911.

If you are coughing up or vomiting blood; have urine that looks red or rusty; have red, black, or tarry bowel movements; or have pain, swelling or discomfort in the stomach, abdomen or joints, call 911. These can be a sign of internal bleeding.

If you have sudden leg or foot pain, purple toes or fingers; sudden dizziness, weakness or headache; shortness of breath; fast heartbeat; pale skin; if you stop urinating; or have yellowing of the eyes or skin, call 911 and get help immediately.

This is not a complete list of side effects. Make sure you discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.

Take Warfarin exactly as prescribed. Do not change your dose. Based on your regular INR blood tests, your healthcare provider may change your dose if needed. Do not miss your healthcare or lab appointments.

Warfarin should be taken once a day, at the same time every day. If you miss a dose, take your Warfarin as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip your missed dose and return to your normal medication schedule.

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Do not double dose. If you think you have taken too much Warfarin, call 911.

Do not take any new medications, herbs, vitamins, nutrition supplements, or over-the-counter medications without first talking to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

Some medications, even over-the-counter medications you take for a cold or upset stomach, can change how your Warfarin is working. This includes vitamins C, K, A and E, over-the-counter cold medications, Aspirin, and Ibuprofen.

Foods high in Vitamin K like kale, spinach and collard greens can affect the way your Warfarin is working. Be consistent each day with the amount of Vitamin K you eat to ensure your Warfarin is working correctly for you. Your healthcare provider can give you a list of foods that contain Vitamin K.

Store Warfarin away from moisture and direct sunlight. Your bathroom medicine cabinet is not the best place because of moisture. Do not leave your medication where it can get too hot or too cold. Always store your medication out of sight and out of reach of children to prevent accidents.

When you are done taking Warfarin, crush all of your remaining tablets and mix them with undesirable trash like kitty litter or coffee grounds. Contact your healthcare provider or pharmacist about the proper way to dispose of your medications.

Warfarin can help prevent harmful blood clots. But it is a powerful medication that should only be taken exactly as prescribed. If you have any questions about Warfarin, ask your healthcare provider and pharmacist for more information.