

Managing AFib Medications

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

When you're considering your medication options, your healthcare team can tell you about medications that could be right for you, but you're the expert in you. Only you can decide which medications fit in with your lifestyle, priorities, and goals, so it's very important that you speak with your healthcare providers about your medication options so that you can pick the right ones for you.

Hi, Mrs. Williams.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Hello.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Today, I was hoping to talk about the medications that you're using to manage your atrial fibrillation.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Well, when we started, we discussed my condition, and how it affects my risk for stroke.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Right. Yes. So, we did talk about how atrial fibrillation is, you know, can cause strokes, and how part of reducing your risk includes being on medicines that could thin your blood and you and I decided that after going through your risk for stroke that, that you would start on a blood thinner. The most common medication that we prescribe to thin your blood is Warfarin. That's the one that you're on.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

The important things for me was how much it cost, and if I had to do things differently.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

When you're thinking about which medicines might be right for you, you have to take into account cost, or any other medical conditions that might affect whether one type of medicine is better for you than another. And we also have to consider your lifestyle, like, your activity levels, and your diet.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Now, by diet you mean what I'm eating, not losing weight.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Right. I mean, it's always important to control your weight and keep it at a healthy level but, you're right, by diet I mean that there's some medicines that you have to take with food. It is a common misperception that you can't eat leafy greens, because they are healthy and it is fine to eat leafy greens, but what's really important is to eat about the same amount of leafy greens. Another important thing is to come in for your blood to be checked, because we want to make sure that it is the right, you know, level. If your blood is not thin enough, then you might be at risk for strokes, but if it's too thin, then you might be at risk for bleeding.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

But, but what if I wanted to, to take a different medication?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Well, that's always a possibility. There are pros and cons to the medications. The, the con of those other medications is sometimes the cost. They can be more expensive than Warfarin, but the pros can be that you don't have to worry about how many leafy greens you're eating. Also, that you don't have to come in for blood checks and that there might be reduced risk of serious bleeding.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

What do you mean by bleeding? I've been fine so far.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Well, there's mild, nuisance bleeding. That's bleeding when you're brushing your teeth, or seeing a little bit of blood on the toilet paper when you wipe, and that bleeding is not serious. Don't be worried, too worried about that, but give me a call so we can discuss it. The other form of bleeding is more serious. That's the life-threatening type of bleeding, and that often shows itself as throwing up blood, or having bloody stool. Sometimes if people have trauma, they fall and they hit their head, they can bleed into their head. And that can all be very serious, so I want you to call me right away should any of those occur.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Are there ways for me to avoid these serious bleeding issues?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

Yeah. There are. So, you can look around your home, and see if there are any areas that might put you at risk of falls, like loose rugs, or objects in the way, and you can you know, tamp them down so that you don't fall. You can wear shoes and try to, you know, avoid scrapes on your feet and cuts and scratches. And you should avoid using medicines like aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen, unless your doctor prescribes them.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Since my medication causes these bleeding issues, should I stop taking them if it's minor bleeding?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

No. You should always stay on the medicine, but if you're thinking about stopping the medicine, please give me a call. If there are any nuisance bleeding stay on your medicine, give me a call, and we'll discuss it, but definitely keep taking your medication.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

What if I miss taking my medications?

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

I know you've been really good taking your medicine, and keeping on your regimen and there's some medicines that it's okay to skip a dose here and there, but blood thinners are not that type of medicine. Blood thinners are, are really important to take every day, because if you miss a dose, you could increase your risk of having a stroke.

So, how are you keeping track of your medications?

Mrs. Williams, Patient

I've been using a pill organizer.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

That's great. And I see you have your nice list here, your medications. That's wonderful.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Yes. Yes.

Dr. Gillian Lautenbach, Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Penn Internal Medicine Associates

And I wanted to discuss any other medications that you might be taking. Just like your diet can interact sometimes with the medications that you're on for Afib, other medications can sometimes interact. And so

there are options that you can take safely, but before you take anything, please call me, or ask your pharmacist. To make sure that they don't interact with your other medications.

Well, I think you're doing a great managing your Afib. And, you know, if you keep up this good work, you know, and the exercise and the diet, I think you're going to be on a pathway to good health.

Mrs. Williams, Patient

Thank you.

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