

# Warfarin

(Coumadin<sup>®</sup>, Jantoven<sup>®</sup>)

Taking your  
medicine safely



Harvard Pilgrim  
HealthCare

# Introduction

This booklet is designed to provide you with important information about warfarin to help you take this medicine safely and effectively. You may also know warfarin by the brand names Jantoven® or Coumadin®. When taking warfarin it is important to get regular blood tests (usually every month) so that your health care provider can make sure you are on the right dose.

Look in the back of this booklet for a medicine calendar to help you track your monthly blood tests and any dose changes.

# What is warfarin?

Warfarin (brand name Coumadin® or Jantoven®) is a medicine that is used to prevent blood clots from forming. Blood clots can block normal blood flow and can cause pain, or worse, break off into pieces and go to the heart, brain, leg or lung and cause serious problems such as a heart attack, stroke, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (clot in the lung). Warfarin does not dissolve clots that already have formed, but it is used to prevent new clots from forming or existing clots from becoming larger. It works by increasing the amount of time it takes for blood to clot.

Health care providers often prescribe warfarin for atrial fibrillation, heart valve replacement, recent orthopedic surgery such as knee or hip replacement, DVT, pulmonary embolism or stroke.

How much warfarin you need may be influenced by illness, other medicines, alcohol, tobacco or even dietary changes. Too much warfarin may cause you to bleed. Too little may let a harmful clot form. **To make sure your dose is in the safe range, it is important to get regular blood tests.**

## How should I take warfarin?

- Take your warfarin dose at the same time every day.
- If you forget to take the dose, tell your health care provider.
- Never take a double dose of warfarin, unless instructed by your health care provider.
- Warfarin can be taken with or without food.

# Why are the blood tests so important?

To be sure you are on the right dose of warfarin, your health care provider will order a blood test called a prothrombin time (protime or PT, for short). The PT numbers are then reported as an INR (International Normalized Ratio). The INR is used by your health care provider to see how fast your blood is clotting. This information is necessary to decide whether your dosage of warfarin needs to change.

When you first start taking warfarin, you may need frequent PT tests until the correct dose is determined. This may be as often as twice a week. After that, regular PT tests will be needed (usually at least once a month). Based upon your medical condition and response to warfarin therapy, your health care provider will determine your warfarin dose.

Discuss with your health care provider the INR range that is right for you. It is very important that you **always go for the blood tests scheduled by your health care provider.**



# What should I know about taking other medicines?

Warfarin interacts with many other medicines, including prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines, vitamins and nutrition/herbal supplements. Other medicines can change the way warfarin affects your body. In some cases your health care provider may need to change the other medicines, or your warfarin dose may need to be changed.

Tell your health care provider about all prescription and non-prescription medicines you are taking.



Some of the medicines that may interact with warfarin include:

- Certain prescription medicines like antifungals or antibiotics
- Non-prescription medicines, such as:
  - ibuprofen (Motrin<sup>®</sup>, Advil<sup>®</sup>)
  - aspirin
  - aspirin-containing ointments and skin creams (Aspercreme<sup>®</sup>)
  - naproxen (Aleve<sup>®</sup>)
  - ulcer and stomach medicines, such as cimetidine (Tagamet<sup>®</sup>), omeprazole (Prilosec<sup>™</sup>), or Pepto-bismol<sup>®</sup>
- Vitamin supplements containing vitamin K, vitamin E or fish oil
- Some herbal medicines, such as St. John's wort, ginkgo, or garlic supplements
- Tobacco

Taking more than 2000mg of acetaminophen (such as Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) per day for longer than a week may require more frequent monitoring of INR as it may increase the risk of bleeding.

# When should I call my health care provider?

The most serious side effect from warfarin is bleeding. Watch for these warning signs and call your health care provider immediately if you experience:

- Cuts that don't stop bleeding
- Increased menstrual flow or vaginal bleeding
- Nosebleeds
- Bleeding gums
- Coughing blood, or throwing up blood (may look like coffee grinds)
- Unusual bruising for unknown reasons
- Red or dark brown urine or red or black stools

If your warfarin dose is not high enough, you may develop a blood clot, DVT or pulmonary embolism. The first symptoms associated with blood clots are most commonly felt in the legs. Call your health care provider if you experience:

- Swelling
- Warmth, tenderness, pain or redness

If a blood clot is small, it may not cause symptoms. In some cases, a pulmonary embolism (which causes difficulty in breathing) is the first sign that you have a clot.



# What should I know about my diet while I'm taking warfarin?

- Eat a sensible, balanced diet.
- Avoid changes in your diet.
- Keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet consistent. Nutritious foods like broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collard greens and spinach are part of a healthy diet. But green, leafy vegetables such as these, and certain vegetable oils (such as canola or soybean oil) contain large amounts of vitamin K. Some legumes such as lentils and chickpeas contain high amounts of vitamin K. Because vitamin K helps the blood to clot, it has a direct impact on the effect of warfarin. Don't avoid these foods, just try to keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet consistent.
- It is best to avoid alcohol use when taking warfarin. Speak to your health care provider about the risks of moderate alcohol use associated with taking warfarin.
- Avoid cranberry or pomegranate juice or products because they may increase the risk of bleeding.
- A diet high in protein and low in carbohydrate may reduce the effects of warfarin. If the amount of protein or carbohydrate in your diet changes, talk to your health care provider. You may require more frequent PT testing.



# Remember...

- It is important to always go for your PT blood tests to keep your INR in the range that your health care provider recommends.
- Do not start, stop or change any medicine except on the advice of your health care provider. Tell your health care provider about all prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines that you are taking.
- Significant changes in your diet may require changes in your dosage of warfarin. Before changing your diet, check with your health care provider to see if you will need more frequent blood tests.
- Ask your health care provider what to do if you accidentally miss a dose. Never take a double dose of warfarin.
- Call your health care provider if you have any unusual bleeding or bruising.
- Tell anyone giving you medical or dental care that you are taking warfarin. Carry an identification card (you can use the attached card at the back of this booklet) or wear a bracelet indicating that you take warfarin.
- Talk to your health care provider before beginning a new exercise program.
- Tell your health care provider if you plan to become pregnant or if you become pregnant while you are taking warfarin.
- This medicine can cause bleeding. To lower your chance of getting cut, use an electric razor for shaving.





Use this medicine calendar to keep track of your warfarin dose and INR results. Check with your health care provider before starting or stopping any medicines. Be sure to get regular PT testing, usually every month.

Date of Test	INR Result	Warfarin Dose	Instructions

Date of Test	INR Result	Warfarin Dose	Instructions

Date of Test	INR Result	Warfarin Dose	Instructions



## **In Emergency, notify:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor's Phone \_\_\_\_\_





**I am using warfarin (Coumadin<sup>®</sup>, Jantoven<sup>®</sup>) for**

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This medicine is used to prevent harmful blood clots from forming.

Please tell this immediately to anyone providing medical or dental care to me.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**D.O.B.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Medical Conditions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Medicines:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Medical Allergies:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Look inside for an  
emergency notification  
card to keep in your  
wallet or purse.**



**Harvard Pilgrim  
HealthCare**

Harvard Pilgrim is an HMO plan  
with a Medicare contract. Enrollment  
in Stride<sup>SM</sup> (HMO) depends on  
contract renewal.