

# Warfarin

Names	The generic drug name is warfarin (war' far in). The brand names are Coumadin® and Jantoven®. There may be other names for this medication.
Why Am I Taking Warfarin?	Warfarin is an <i>anticoagulant</i> medication – it decreases your blood ability to clot. It is used to prevent blood clots in your blood and blood vessels. It helps to prevent them from forming, and it helps keep existing clots from getting larger. It does not break up existing blood clots.
How is Warfarin Given?	This medication is usually taken by mouth, once a day. Try to take it around the same time every day. Your doctor may start you on a low dose and gradually increase or decrease the dose, based on the results of blood tests that measure your blood's ability to clot. <b>Do not stop taking warfarin without talking to your doctor first.</b>
How Does it Work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Warfarin blocks the formation of vitamin K-dependent clotting factors in your liver. Vitamin K is needed to make clotting factors that help the blood to clot and prevent bleeding. Vitamin K is found naturally in foods such as leafy, green vegetables and some vegetable oils such as soybean and canola oils. (See Coumadin Therapy and Your Diet patient education brochure.)</li><li>• Warfarin reduces the body's ability to make blood clots. It can help stop harmful clots from forming and keeps clots from getting larger.</li><li>• Warfarin begins to reduce blood clotting within 24 hours after taking it. The full effect may take 72-96 hours.</li><li>• The anti-clotting effects of a single dose of Coumadin® last 2 to 5 days but it is important for you to take your medication exactly as your healthcare provider prescribes it.</li></ul>

## What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Warfarin?

Tell your doctor if you:

- are allergic to warfarin or have any other allergies
- have or have ever had a blood or bleeding problem, high blood pressure, heart attack or heart disease/condition, stroke, anemia, aneurysm (weakening/tearing of a blood vessel), a recent serious injury, or liver or kidney disease
- have an infection, diabetes, chronic diarrhea,
- use tobacco products
- are pregnant or breastfeeding

**This drug may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Other medications can affect how well warfarin works. It is extremely important that you tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you take.**

## Why do I Need Blood Tests?

Keep all your lab and doctor appointments. You will need frequent blood tests to make sure your dose is not too low or too high, both of which could pose a risk to your health. Blood tests called INRs tell your doctor how your medicine is working. The INR will be a number like: **1.7 or 2.0 or 2.6 or 3.8 or 5.8**. The higher the number, the longer it will take your blood to clot. An INR “target range” will be made for you.

After each blood test, your physician will contact you for instructions on your next dose of Coumadin® and your next blood test. (Your dose may or may not change after each blood test.) If you do not hear from us, please continue with the same dosing instructions. If you have any questions or concerns, always call your doctor.

## What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Headache, dizziness, weakness
- Gas, bloating, abdominal pain
- Change in the way things taste
- Nausea, vomiting

## When Should I Call the Doctor?

**Call your doctor immediately if you have:**

- unusual bruising or bleeding: bleeding that lasts more than 10-15 minutes or that causes dizziness; black or bloody stools, nosebleeds, bleeding from your gums, coughing up/vomiting blood or material that looks like coffee grounds, increased menstrual flow or vaginal bleeding, pink/red/dark brown urine, headache, dizziness, weakness

When Should I  
Call the Doctor?  
(continued)

**Call your doctor immediately if you have:**

- pain, swelling, hot or cold feeling, skin changes, or discoloration anywhere on your body
- sudden, severe leg or arm pain, purple toes or fingers
- any sign of an allergic reaction: itching, hives, difficulty swallowing or breathing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, or swelling in your face, mouth, throat, or hands
- yellowing of your skin or eyes
- any sign of infection: fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, cough, sore throat, pain or burning upon urination; redness or tenderness along a vein, at an IV site, or at any other wound or skin irritation.
- extreme tiredness, lack of energy, loss of appetite, flu-like symptoms

What Else  
Should I Know  
About Warfarin?

- If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember IF it is still the same day. **NEVER take 2 tablets to “catch up” even if you miss a dose.**
- Avoid drinking alcohol while taking warfarin.
- Tell doctors and dentists you are taking warfarin.
- Taking warfarin increases the risk of severe bleeding that can be life-threatening. The risk is higher during the first month of treatment, for people taking warfarin at high doses or for a long time, and for people over age 65 years.
- It may take longer than usual to stop bleeding if you are cut or injured. Avoid activities with a high risk of injury. Take precautions and protect yourself – use a soft bristled toothbrush, wear socks and shoes outdoors, use an electric shaver, and wear gloves while gardening.
- If your doctor tells you to stop taking warfarin, the effects of this medication may last for 2 to 5 days after you stop taking it.
- Wear a medical alert tag or carry an ID card stating that you take warfarin. Any medical care provider who treats you should know that you are taking this medicine.
- Storing warfarin: Room temperature away from heat, moisture, light.
- Talk to your doctor before changing your diet. Foods that are high in vitamin K can make warfarin less effective.
- Avoid grapefruit, cranberry, and pomegranate juices; they may interact with warfarin and lead to unwanted side effects.
- If you would like more information about warfarin, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.