

My Guide to Coumadin[®] /warfarin Therapy



AHRQ

Partnerships for Implementing
Patient Safety Grant Program

This publication was developed and printed through leveraged grant funds from the Wellmark Foundation in support of Kirkwood Community College and the Cedar Rapids Healthcare Alliance, Partnership for Implementing Patient Safety grant project, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Award Number 1 U18 HS015830-01. The opinions presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Wellmark Foundation or AHRQ. AHRQ and Kirkwood Community College are granted a nonexclusive, irrevocable copyright license to this work as provided for by agency rule. All other rights are reserved by the copyright owner, the Cedar Rapids Healthcare Alliance, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

For permission to reprint please contact Carla Huber, Nurse Coordinator of the Cedar Rapids Community Anticoagulation Clinic by telephone at (319) 558-4045 or by email at chuber@pcofiowa.com.

Contents

	Page
Welcome	4
Communication with the CAT Clinic	5
What Coumadin®/warfarin Is and What It Does for Me.....	6
How to Take Coumadin®/warfarin.....	7
Blood Tests.....	8
Possible Side Effects of Coumadin®/warfarin.....	9
How I Can Stay Safe Taking Coumadin®/warfarin	10-11
Using Other Medications	12-13
Diet for Coumadin®/warfarin Users.....	14-15
How Taking Coumadin®/warfarin Changes My Life	16
Taking Care of Your Health While on Coumadin®/warfarin	17
Bibliography.....	18-19

Inserts: (The CAT Clinic nurse will provide materials as needed.)

- Atrial Fibrillation
- Deep Vein Thrombosis
- Heart Attack
- Heart Valve Replacement
- Peripheral Vascular Disease
- Pregnancy
- Pulmonary Embolism
- Stroke
- Valvular Heart Disease

Welcome

Dear _____,

Welcome to the Community Anticoagulation Therapy (CAT) Clinic. Your doctor has started you on the medication Coumadin[®]/warfarin. Patients who are on Coumadin[®]/warfarin must be watched closely. You will need to have blood drawn often. You will also need to be careful that you do not do something to hurt yourself and cause bleeding. The CAT Clinic is here to help you. We will work with you and your doctor to keep you healthy and safe while you are taking Coumadin[®]/warfarin.

Starting on a new medicine, especially one you may have to take for a long period of time, can make you worry. To help you learn about your medication, the CAT Clinic has prepared a notebook with materials for you to take home and read. The information in the notebook will help you understand why you are taking Coumadin[®]/warfarin and how to keep yourself healthy. Please take time to read all of the information in the notebook. If you have any questions call the CAT Clinic.

You can stay healthy even when you have a health problem that needs special medication. You, your doctor, and the CAT Clinic will work together as a team to make sure that taking a medication like Coumadin[®]/warfarin does not stop you from living well and safely.



Remember:

- The CAT Clinic is here to help you. Call if you have questions.
- Read the information given to you on Coumadin[®]/warfarin.
- Keep your notebook with information on Coumadin[®]/warfarin at home where you can find it easily.

Communication with the CAT Clinic

It is important that the clinic can always contact you. Please make sure you have a phone that can take messages. If you do not have a phone that takes messages the CAT Clinic must have the phone number of someone who can take a message for you. This person should be able to reach you easily and give you messages from the CAT Clinic. This person might be a family member or close friend. If we cannot reach you by phone, we will call them.

If we need to talk with you about your medication we will first call you by phone. If we cannot reach you after 3 phone calls, we will send you a letter with instructions. If we do not hear from you 5 days after the letter was sent you will no longer be able to stay in the CAT Clinic program.



Call the Community Anticoagulation Therapy (CAT) Clinic:

319-558-4046

Office Hours are: Monday – Friday 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

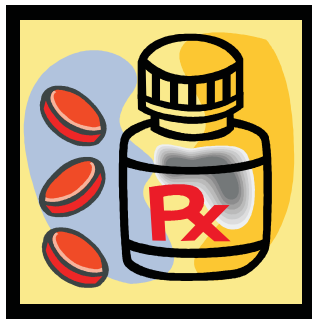


Remember:

- The CAT Clinic must be able to reach you by phone.
- Give the CAT Clinic the phone number of someone who can reach you that has a phone that takes messages.

What Coumadin[®]/warfarin Is and What It Does for Me

Coumadin[®]/warfarin is a medicine that will keep your blood from clotting. The drug is an anticoagulant. “Anti” means against and “coagulant” means to thicken into a gel or solid. Sometimes this drug is called a blood thinner. Think of syrup being poured from a can: it is sticky and thick and flows slowly. Coumadin[®]/warfarin helps your blood to flow easier and not clot.



Coumadin[®]/warfarin will:

- keep your blood from making clots.
- help your blood flow easily.

There are many reasons people take Coumadin[®]/warfarin.

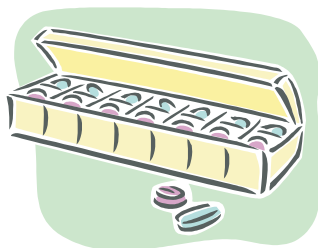
You are taking this drug for: _____

(A sheet will be given to you with an explanation.)

How to Take Coumadin[®]/warfarin

Please take your pills as directed. You must take the pills only on the days your doctor or CAT Clinic nurse tells you to. The amount of Coumadin[®]/warfarin each person needs is different. The dose is based on a blood test called the INR. The amount of medication you take may change, based on the blood test. It needs to be taken at the same time, usually in the evening.

Coumadin[®]/warfarin can be taken with other medications. Never skip a dose and never take a double dose. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you don't remember until the next day, please call the CAT Clinic for instructions. If this happens on a weekend or holiday, skip the missed dose and start again the next day. Mark the missing dose in your diary. A daily pillbox will help you keep track of your dose.



- Go for blood tests as directed.
- Never skip a dose.
- Never take a double dose.
- Take Coumadin[®]/warfarin in the evening at the same time as directed by the CAT Clinic nurse.
- May be taken with other medications or food.

Blood Tests



The doctor decides how much Coumadin[®]/warfarin you need by testing your blood. The blood test the doctor will use is called the INR blood test. The test measures how fast your blood is clotting and lets the doctor know if your dosage should change. If your INR blood test is too high you are at risk for bleeding problems. If it is too low you are at risk for forming clots. Your doctor has decided on a range on the INR blood test that is right for you.



Regulating your blood with Coumadin[®]/warfarin is like balancing a scale. If you take too much you will increase bleeding; if you don't take enough your blood will clot. Getting your blood within the target range is getting it balanced.

When you first start taking Coumadin[®]/warfarin you may have your blood checked often. Once the INR blood test is in the target range and the correct dose is reached, this test is done less often.

Because your dose is based on the INR blood test it is very **important that you get your blood tested on the date and at the time that you are told.**

My INR blood test range is: _____

Possible Side Effects of Coumadin[®]/warfarin

Side effects with Coumadin[®]/warfarin are not common. Most side effects relate to how the medicine works. To lower the risk of bleeding, your blood Coumadin[®]/warfarin level will be kept within a range that is right for you. Minor bleeding can occur even when your INR blood test is in range. For example, you may notice small bruises or slight gum bleeding when you brush your teeth. Some people may experience hair loss or skin rashes, but this is rare. If you have something abnormal that you feel may be caused by your medication, please contact the CAT Clinic.



Slight Bleeding - you may notice from time to time:

- Gum bleeding while brushing teeth.
- Occasional nosebleed.
- Easy bruising.
- Bleeding after a minor cut that stops within a few minutes.
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal.

Major Bleeding - Call the CAT Clinic, your doctor, or go to the emergency department if you have any of the following:



- Red, dark, coffee or cola colored urine.
- Bowel movements that are red or look like tar.
- Too much bleeding from the gums or nose.
- Throwing up coffee colored or bright red substance.
- Coughing up red-tinged secretions.
- Severe pain (such as headache or stomachache).
- Sudden appearance of bruises for no reason.
- Excessive menstrual bleeding.
- A cut that will not stop bleeding within 10 minutes.
- A serious fall.
- Hitting your head.

How I Can Stay Safe Taking Coumadin®/warfarin

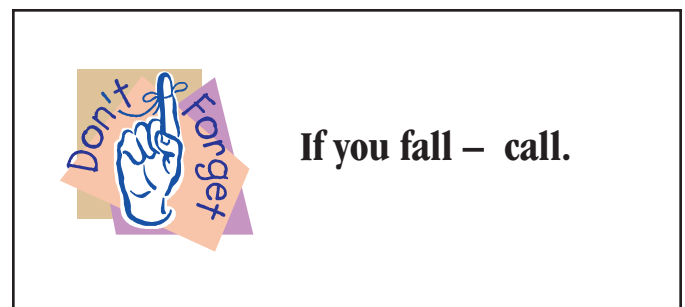
You have read earlier in this notebook that Coumadin®/warfarin makes you bleed more easily. Because of that, it is important for you to have some information about how to stay safe while you are taking Coumadin®/warfarin.

You will need to be careful with objects that could make you bleed. You will also want to avoid some activities and sports that could cause injury. For example, it is not a good idea to take up rock climbing while you are on Coumadin®/warfarin. This is not to say you cannot do the things that you like to do, but when doing them, you need to think about how you can protect yourself from injury. For example, if you like to work in the yard, be sure to wear sturdy shoes and gloves. Sports activities that would be safe for you include swimming and walking.

If you do hurt yourself and the bleeding does not stop, you need to get help immediately. Go to the hospital. After you have been cared for at the hospital, call the CAT Clinic, during regular clinic hours, to let the nurse know what happened.

It is very important to know that you can be bleeding and not see any blood. For example, you could fall and hit your head, and bleeding could occur under your skull. Or, you could fall and hurt your arm and notice a large purple bruise. This would be bleeding under the skin. Call your doctor or go to the hospital immediately if you have taken a bad fall, even if you are not bleeding. Again, after you have been cared for, call the CAT Clinic during regular clinic hours to let the nurse know what happened.

Talk to your doctor about wearing a MedicAlert® bracelet. If you are badly injured and unable to speak, the bracelet would tell health care workers that you are on Coumadin®/warfarin. The nurse at the CAT Clinic can help you get an alert bracelet.

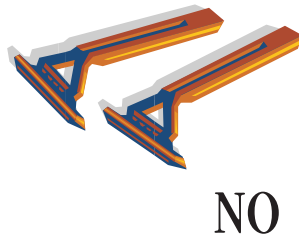


How I Can Stay Safe Taking Coumadin®/warfarin

To Prevent Injury

Inside

- Use an electric razor.
- Use a soft toothbrush.
- Use waxed dental floss.
- Do not use toothpicks.
- Wear shoes or non-skid slippers in the house.
- Take care trimming your toenails.
- Be very careful using knives and scissors.
- Do not trim corns or calluses yourself.



Outside

- Always wear shoes.
- Wear gardening gloves when doing yard work.
- Avoid activities and sports that can easily hurt you.
- Be very careful with sharp tools; wear gloves when using them.



Remember:

- Wear a MedicAlert® Bracelet.
- If you fall – call.
- Go to the hospital when you are badly hurt. Call the CAT Clinic, during regular hours, after you have been helped, to let them know what happened.

Using Other Medications

When Coumadin[®]/warfarin is taken with other medicines it can change the way other medicines work. Other medicines can also change the way Coumadin[®]/warfarin works. **It is very important to tell the CAT Clinic about all of the other medicines that you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines, nutritional supplements, or herbal products.**

Any product containing aspirin lessens the blood's ability to form clots and adds to the effect of Coumadin[®]/warfarin. Never take aspirin without telling the CAT Clinic. If you take one aspirin daily your daily dose should not go beyond 325 mg.



Other products that have aspirin:

- Excedrin[®]
- Alka-seltzer[®]
- Ascriptin[®]
- Bayer[®]
- Bufferin[®]
- Ecotrin[®]
- Empirin[®]
- Nyquil[®]
- Pepto Bismol[®]
- Percodan[®]

Medications that can be taken:

- Mild pain Tylenol[®]/acetaminophen. No more than 1 gram per day. This is: 4 of the 325 mg tablets or 2 of the 500 mg tablets.
- Laxative Milk of Magnesia or Colace.
- Vitamins check with the CAT Clinic nurse.
- Cold or allergy.
 - Allerest[®]
 - Orenex[®]
 - Contact[®]
 - Sinutab[®]

Using Other Medications

All medications must be approved by your doctor and the CAT Clinic, including medicines you have taken before you started Coumadin[®]/warfarin. Following is a list of some common medications that need to be approved by your doctor.



■ Ibuprofen

- Advil[®]
- Excedrin IB[®]
- Haltran[®]
- Mediprin[®]
- Midol[®]
- Motrin[®]
- Nuprin[®]
- Pamprin HB[®]

■ naproxen

- Aleve[®]
- Anaprox[®]
- Naprosyn[®]

■ cimetidine

- Tagamet HB[®]

■ famotidine

- Pepcid AC[®]

■ Herbal Products

- danshen
- garlic
- ginkgo
- ginseng
- green tea
- kava kava



Always tell the CAT Clinic about medications you are taking. Tell the clinic when you start taking new medicines and when you stop taking medicines.

Diet for Coumadin[®]/warfarin Users

The foods that you eat can affect how well Coumadin[®]/warfarin works for you. The most important thing to remember is to eat what you normally eat and not make any major changes in your diet without calling the CAT Clinic. Do not go on a weight loss plan while taking Coumadin[®]/warfarin. Do not add any vitamins or nutrition supplements to your diet without first checking with the CAT Clinic. For example, do not take Ensure or SlimFast without talking to the nurse at the CAT Clinic.

Especially important with Coumadin[®]/warfarin is to keep your intake of Vitamin K regular. Vitamin K is important for blood to clot. Since Coumadin[®]/warfarin works to keep blood from clotting, high amounts of Vitamin K might work against Coumadin[®]/warfarin.



The highest amount of Vitamin K is found in green and leafy vegetables like broccoli, different kinds of lettuce, cabbage and spinach. The main thing to remember is - **keep your diet the same**, including foods you eat that contain Vitamin K. If you normally eat a salad for lunch – keep eating a salad for lunch. A list of foods high in Vitamin K is on the next page of your notebook.

Please call the CAT Clinic if you are unable to eat for several days, for whatever reason. Also call if you have stomach problems, vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than one day. These problems could affect your Coumadin[®]/warfarin dosage.



Things to remember about your diet:

- Eat what you normally eat. Be consistent.
- Call the CAT Clinic if you have stomach problems lasting more than 1 day.

Foods High in Vitamin K

■ Vegetables

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Brussel sprouts
- Green onions
- Avocado

■ Leafy Greens

- Iceberg lettuce
- Green leaf lettuces
- Spinach
- Turnip greens
- Parsley
- Endive
- Kale
- Collard greens

■ Meats

- Beef liver
- Pork liver

■ Other

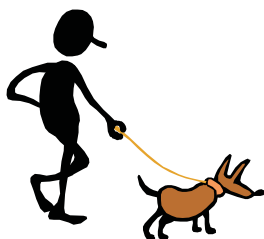
- Mayonnaise
- Margarine
- Canola Oil
- Soybean Oil



You do not have to stop eating these foods. Eat them as often as you always have. Be consistent – maintain your eating habits.

How Taking Coumadin®/warfarin Changes My Life

Although Coumadin®/warfarin is a medication that has some serious side effects, you do not need to make changes in the way you live.



Activity

Stay active. Exercise is important to your health. Think about the sports and activities you like doing. Do they put you at risk for injury? If so, try another activity and use protection to keep you safe while you are doing it. For example, if you like to ride your bike, be sure you wear a helmet and gloves. If you would like to start a new activity that will increase the amount of exercise you get every day, talk to your doctor or the CAT Clinic nurse.



Diet

Keep it balanced. Read carefully the information in this notebook on diet, especially about foods high in Vitamin K. Ask questions if you do not understand something.



Alcohol

Alcohol can affect your Coumadin®/warfarin dosage but it does not mean you must avoid all alcohol. It is suggested that alcohol intake be limited to 1-2 drinks per day. Most important is that you keep to your pattern. For example, if you are used to having a glass of wine with dinner, continue to have a glass of wine. The same would be true of beer or a mixed drink. Do not drink more than usual. Serious problems can occur with alcohol and Coumadin®/warfarin when you drink more than 2 drinks a day or when you change your usual pattern. Saturday night binges would not be good for you. Be careful at special occasions or holidays—drink only what you usually do on any day of the week.

Taking Care of Your Health While on Coumadin®/warfarin

Because you are on Coumadin®/warfarin you will be seen regularly by the CAT Clinic and the doctor who ordered your medication. There are also other doctors you see regularly to keep yourself healthy. When you see other doctors or caregivers it is very important that you tell them you are taking Coumadin®/warfarin. It is a good idea to bring this notebook with you to your appointments. You should also tell your dentist and the person who cleans your teeth.



Keep a list of all your medications. Bring the list with you when you visit your doctor or the CAT Clinic. If a doctor orders a new medication for you, please call the CAT Clinic so we can note it in your record. If you need to have surgery, please call the CAT Clinic.

Illness can affect your INR blood test and your Coumadin®/warfarin dose. If you become ill with a fever, influenza or an infection, call the CAT Clinic. Also call if you have diarrhea and vomiting lasting more than 1 day.

When everyone who takes care of your health knows what is happening with you, you will stay safe and healthy on Coumadin®/warfarin.



Tell all your doctors and your dentist you are on Coumadin®/warfarin.

Bibliography

Arteriosclerosis of the extremities (n.d.) Retrieved February 20, 2006 from Medline Plus Web site:
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000170.htm>

Ask me 3. (n.d.). Retrieved January 30, 2006, from <http://www.askme3.org/>

Building a Health literacy Curriculum (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2006, from University of Virginia
Web site: <http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/som-hlc/home.cfm>

Clear & Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low-Literate Readers (n.d.). Retrieved
February 1, 2006 from National Cancer Institute Web site: [http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/oc/
clear-and-simple/](http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/oc/clear-and-simple/)

Coumadin. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from Bristol-Myers Squibb Company Web site:
http://www.coumadin.com/coumadin/home/consumer_index.jsp?BV_UseBVCookie=Yes
The graphic for the heart in atrial fibrillation is printed with approval from Jeffrey C. MacDonald from
the Bristol-Myers Squibb Company.

Deep Vein Thrombosis Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from Society of Interventional
Radiology Website: <http://www.sirweb.org/patPub/DVTOverview.shtml>

Dudek, S. (2006). Nutrition Essentials for Nursing Practice (5th Edition). St. Louis: Mosby.

Flesch Reading Ease and Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level per Microsoft Word Program

Froehlich, J. (n.d.). Retrieved January 20, 2006 from University of Michigan Health System
Anticoagulation Service Web site: <http://www.med.umich.edu/cvc/images/pdf/livwanti.pdf>

Heart Attack. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from [http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.
jhtml?identifier=4578](http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4578)

Heart Attack Center. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from [http://www.medicinenet.com/
heart_attack/page5.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/heart_attack/page5.htm)

Bibliography

- Heart Valve Replacement. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from <http://www.sjm.com/procedures/procedure.aspx?name=Heart+Valve+Replacement>
- How is Peripheral Vascular Disease Treated? (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from <http://www.guidant.com/webapp/emarketing/compass/comp.jsp?lev1=pvd&lev2=tx>
- LeMone, P. (2004). *Medical-Surgical Nursing: Critical Thinking in Client Care* (3rd Edition). New Jersey: Prentice Hall Health.
- Pagana, K. (2006). *Manual of Diagnostic and Laboratory Tests* (3rd Edition). St. Louis: Mosby
- Prosthetic Heart Valves. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from <http://cape.uwaterloo.ca/che100projects/heart/files/testing.htm>
- The Iowa Literacy Resource Center (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2006, from <http://www.readiowa.org>
- Valvular Heart Disease Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006, from <http://heart.healthcentersonline.com/heartvalve/valvulardiseaseoverview.cfm>
- What are the Types of Stroke? (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2006 from, <http://www.strokeassociation.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1014>
- What is Health Literacy? (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2006 from <http://www.pfizerhealthliteracy.com/initiative.pdf>
- Permission for graphic on peripheral vascular disease supplemental sheet reprinted with permission of <http://www.graystone.net>
- Permission for graphic on pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis supplemental sheets reprinted with permission of the Society of Interventional Radiology ©2004, www.SIRweb.org