

WARFARIN

Why is this medication prescribed?

Warfarin is used to prevent blood clots (thrombosis) from forming or growing larger in the arteries or veins. Warfarin has an anticoagulant effect on the blood. It slows down the clotting process helping to prevent thrombosis from occurring or reoccurring.

Blood clots can lead to stroke, heart attack or thrombosis in the lungs or legs.

Warfarin may be used for any of the following conditions:

- Deep vein Thrombosis (blood clots in the legs)
- Pulmonary Embolus (blood clots in the lungs)
- Heart Conditions (Atrial Fibrillation, Valve Surgery)
- Stroke
- Other Blood Clotting Conditions

This medicine is sometimes prescribed for other uses; ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

How does Warfarin work?

The liver is the body's main factory. Here, sugars, fats and proteins are broken down and others are made. It is this site where the body makes the proteins it uses to cause the blood to clot. The body's action in blood clotting is quite complex, and uses a series of proteins secreted into the blood by the liver to interact with other substances found in the blood.

Warfarin slows the production of some of these clotting proteins that are made in the liver. It does so by inhibiting the action of Vitamin K, which promotes the formation of some of the clotting proteins.

How should this medicine be used?

Warfarin comes as a tablet to take by mouth. It should be taken roughly at the same time every day. Warfarin can be taken before, during or after a meal. Most people take their Warfarin in the evening.

Warfarin tablets come in different strengths (e.g. 1mg, 2mg, 3mg and 5mg.) Your doctor will prescribe you each of the different strengths as you will need to alter your dose depending on the results of your International Normalized Ratio (INR)

For example:

You may be taking 6mg:

6mg = 1mg tablet + 5mg tablet

Your doctor may change your dose to 4mg:

4mg = 2mg tablet + 2mg tablet

There are two brands of Warfarin: *Coumadin* and *Marevan*.

DO NOT swap from one brand to the other.

DO NOT combine these brands.

DO NOT stop taking Warfarin without talking to your doctor.

Missed dose:

If you remember within 3-4 hours then take the dose. If you are unsure or remember after this time, then take your normal dose the next day. Do not take a double dose in order to make up for the missed dose.

Follow the directions on your prescription label carefully and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any part of it that you do not understand. Take Warfarin exactly as directed. Do not take more or less of it than prescribed by your doctor. If you have trouble with this (for example – poor vision), have someone help you with your pills.

Why do I need to have regular blood tests while taking warfarin?

The regular blood test that you have while taking Warfarin measures your International Normalized Ratio (INR). INR is an International Normalized Ratio of the anti-clotting effect of your blood. You will need to have your blood checked at regular

intervals to ensure that you are taking the right dose. This is usually more frequent when you commence Warfarin as it takes time to determine the dose of Warfarin that enables you to achieve a therapeutic level.

What special precautions should I follow?

- **Other Medications:**

DO NOT take any prescription or nonprescription (these include vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements) medicines without first talking to your doctor. Certain medications such as Aspirin, Ibuprofen and antibiotics can interfere with your INR level. Remind anyone who prescribes medicine to you that you are on Warfarin.

- **Diet:**

Maintain a balanced diet. Foods high in Vitamin K will affect your INR level. These include: Green, leafy vegetables such as: broccoli, lettuce, spinach, cabbage and parsley. Doctors usually encourage patients to include these nutritious foods in a healthy diet. Try to maintain a consistent portion of foods containing Vitamin K to help keep your INR stable.

Alcohol will affect your response to Warfarin. Discuss your alcohol consumption with your doctor.

- **Surgery / Dental work:**

Inform the person doing the procedure that you are taking Warfarin.

- **Bleeding and Bruising:**

Report any unusual bleeding or bruising to your doctor. If you have a serious fall or bump your head, it is advised that you see your doctor.

- **Pregnancy:**

You should not take Warfarin if you are pregnant. Notify your doctor immediately if you are pregnant.