

Other medicines and herbal supplements

A lot of other medicines can change how warfarin works. (eg some antibiotics and medicines for arthritis can increase the risk of bleeding). Even St John's wort, ginkgo, ginseng, cranberry juice, ginger, garlic and vitamin E can affect warfarin.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any medicines and herbal supplements you take.

Call a doctor immediately if you have:

- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Fever or infection
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Unexplained pain
- Severe headache
- Loss of appetite for 2-3 days
- Blood in the toilet - either urine or faeces (red or black bowel motions)
- Changes to your skin (rash or itching)

You can get more information from:

Your pharmacist, doctor, practice nurse or

www.medsafe.govt.nz

www.healthnavigator.org.nz

SAFER
SAFER USE OF HIGH RISK MEDICINES

This is a guide only and not a replacement for advice and care of your doctor, pharmacist (chemist) or nurse.

What else do you need to know?

- Tell all health providers (eg doctor, dentist, pharmacist, physiotherapist) that you take warfarin
- Avoid activities where you might get hurt and bleed (eg contact sports)
- Do not get new tattoos or piercings
- Do not have a body massage; it can cause bruising
- Before changing to your diet, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse

What causes blood clots?

- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Sitting or lying in one position for a long time (long flights or long car journeys)
- Pregnancy
- Oral contraceptives (The Pill)
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Surgery, major injuries or paralysis
- Cancer and its treatments
- Some inherited conditions

Checklist on discharge from hospital

- Warfarin book
- Discharge prescription
- Laboratory form for blood test
- Dose of warfarin to take



Warfarin

What you need to know

What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a medicine that helps to prevent blood clots. In New Zealand there are two brands of warfarin, Marevan® and Coumadin®. Most people take Marevan® but whichever brand you take, stick to it, don't switch or mix the brands.

The tablets below are the Marevan® brand. If your tablets look different, ask your pharmacist which brand you have been given.



1mg (brown)



3mg (blue)



5mg (pink)

Why do you need warfarin?

You need warfarin because you have, or are at risk of having a blood clot. Clots are harmful; they can block the blood flow in an artery or vein.

When should you take it?

Take your tablets (as one dose), once a day, at the same time each day. Evening is best so you can have your blood test in the morning.

Mark the calendar when you take your dose.

What should you do if you forget?

If it is the same day, take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If you forgot yesterday's dose only take the dose you are meant to have today. NEVER take a catch-up dose and never take more than one dose a day.

Tell your doctor about any missed doses.

How long do you need to take warfarin?

It depends on your condition. Your doctor will tell you how long you need to take it.

Pregnancy

Warfarin should not be used during pregnancy as it can harm your baby. Talk to your doctor if you take warfarin and think you might be pregnant, or want to have a baby.

Breast feeding

Warfarin is safe during breast feeding; it does not pass into the breast milk.

Your diet

Eat a balanced low-fat diet. Some foods have vitamin K in them which can affect how warfarin works (eg spinach, broccoli, lettuce, soya beans, beef, liver, alfalfa and green tea). Eat only small amounts of these. More than two standard alcoholic drinks per day can increase the risk of bleeding. Do not have any more than this.

Your blood tests

Everyone's dose is different, and your dose has to be right for you. To find the right dose you need to have a blood test regularly called the INR (International Normalised Ratio). The INR measures how fast your blood clots and should be between 2 and 4. The test is usually done at a laboratory but some pharmacies can do it for you.

Your doctor will tell you:

- The INR level that is best for you
- The warfarin dose you need to take
- How often you need an INR blood test

If you are in hospital, your blood will be tested there. When you are at home your doctor will give you a form to take to a laboratory when you need a blood test.

When you get your blood tested

In the morning: Have your blood test at the laboratory

In the afternoon: Ring your doctor or nurse; they will tell you what dose to take

In the evening: Take your dose and keep a record that you have taken it (eg by marking the calendar)

Testing at your pharmacy

Some community pharmacies offer blood testing (with a finger-prick) and can tell you the dose of warfarin to take. Ask your pharmacy if they can do this for you.