

Information about your blood thinning medicines warfarin and Synthrome®

Haematology Department

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Information for Patients

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Introduction

You have been prescribed blood-thinning (anticoagulant) medicines to take by mouth. This is usually either warfarin or Synthrome®

We need to check the time it takes for your blood to clot. This is so that we know what dose of anticoagulant you need. We do this by a regular blood test known as an international normalised ratio (INR). This measures how long it takes for your blood to clot.

Do these medicines have any side effects?

Most people taking these medicines do not have side effects. You should tell your GP as soon as possible if you have any of the following:

- Unexplained bruising and/or bleeding
- Pink or red pee (urine) or black poo (stools)
- Nose bleeds or heavily bloodshot eyes
- Coughing up blood
- Vomiting blood
- Heavy periods, especially if you are passing clots
- Severe headaches

If you have any of these symptoms you **must** report them to your GP right away or call 111.

If the bleeding is heavy, dial 999.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

How long will I be on anticoagulants?

- This depends on the medical condition you have that needs treatment
- Your doctor or nurse will tell you when to start the treatment and how long it is likely to last
- Some patients need treatment for just a few months, others will need it for life

When should I take my anticoagulant ?

- You should take your anticoagulant **once** a day, at roughly the same time each day
- We advise that you take it between 5pm and 7pm
- To keep track of when to take your tablets, set an alarm on your phone or use a calendar as a reminder
- Or you could put your tablets in a **dosette box**. This is a plastic box with small compartments that clearly shows which tablets need to be taken and when to take them

What dose of anticoagulant should I take?

Your doctor or nurse will:

- Tell you what dose to take. This depends on the result of your INR blood test
- Tell you when to have your next INR blood test
- Make changes to your anticoagulant dose as needed. This is to keep your INR within the range that has been set for you

Remember to check that you are taking the right amount of tablets before you take them and make sure you are taking the right dose.

Where and when should I have my INR blood test?

- You should have your INR blood test at your GP surgery
- When you start taking anticoagulants you will need an INR test every week
- As your INR becomes more stable, your INR test can be done less often
- It is **very important** that you have your INR test on time

Your yellow book and alert card

- Please remember to bring your yellow anticoagulation treatment book to all appointments
- You must carry your alert card with you at all times. An alert card is a special card that has information about your anticoagulation medication. You will get this from your doctor or nurse.

What about eating and drinking?

The amount of vitamin K in your diet can affect how well warfarin works. If your diet remains the same the warfarin dosage will be in line with how much vitamin K is in your diet. If you change your diet to foods that are richer in vitamin K then you will find you need more warfarin. If your diet changes to have more foods that are low in vitamin K then your warfarin dose may need to be less.

- As a simple rule, green, leafy vegetables tend to be rich in vitamin K
- Do **not** go on “crash” diets
- Do **not** eat too much of 1 type of food
- Do not drink cranberry juice or eat cranberries

(for reference **see 1.1** at the end of the leaflet)

Can I drink alcohol?

You must avoid drinking too much alcohol. It can affect the way anticoagulants work and increase your risk of bleeding.

- 1 pint of beer (4%) is equal to **2.3** units of alcohol
- 1 pint of cider (4.5%) is equal to **2.6** units of alcohol
- 1 measure (25mls) of spirit (40%) is equal to **1** unit of alcohol
- 1 small glass (175mls) wine (13%) is equal to **2.3** units of alcohol

(for reference **see 2.2** at the end of the leaflet)

We would advise you to drink no more than 2 alcohol units per day.

What if I need surgery or dental treatment?

- Before any treatment you must tell your doctor or dentist that you are taking anticoagulation medication.
- You do not need to stop taking anticoagulants for most dental procedures, such as having a tooth removed. Your dentist will be able to advise you.

Can I exercise whilst on anticoagulation treatment?

- Yes, but you should not take part in contact sports because there is a risk of bleeding or injury.

How else can I stop or minimise the risk of bleeding?

You should take precautions such as:

- Using an electric or battery razor

- Use a soft toothbrush
- Wear gloves for gardening
- Do not walk barefoot
- Taking extra care when using power tools

What should I do if I am injured whilst on anticoagulation treatment?

- If you have a minor injury, apply constant direct pressure to the site of bleeding for about 5 to 10 minutes, using a clean dry dressing
- If your arm or leg is affected, raise it. This is to help stop the bleeding
- If you are not able to stop the bleeding, or suffer a more major injury, you should ask for medical help right away
- If you suffer any **head injury or fall**, you should get medical attention right away.

What should I do if I think I may be pregnant ?

- You should not plan to become pregnant without talking to your doctor. This is because anticoagulants taken in the first few weeks of pregnancy may harm the unborn child.
- If you think you may be pregnant while taking anticoagulants, contact your GP as soon as possible.

What should I do if I plan to go on holiday ?

- You may need to have your blood tested whilst you are on holiday . Depending on where you are going, you may need to pay for this.

Can I have the ‘flu’ vaccine and the COVID vaccine?

- The ‘flu’ and COVID vaccines are unlikely to affect your INR. Ask your GP before having the vaccine.

Can I take other medicines whilst on anticoagulation treatment?

- When buying ‘over the counter ’ medicines, tell the pharmacist you are taking an anticoagulant.
- Tell any doctor or nurse who is prescribing, or making changes to, your medication that you are taking an anticoagulant.
- If you have been prescribed any new medication, you should tell the doctor, nurse or pharmacist who checks your INR . New medication can affect your INR. You may be told to have an INR test earlier than planned.

Can I take other medicines ?

- Medicines that have **aspirin** should only be taken if prescribed by your doctor or hospital consultant
- Do **not** take medicines that contain **ibuprofen** and other anti-inflammatory medication
- You can take paracetamol
- Do **not** take vitamin supplements that contain **vitamin K**

A summary of the important advice

You should:

- Report any signs of bruising or bleeding
- Have your INR blood tests done on time
- Take your anticoagulant at the same time each day, preferably in the evening
- If you forget to take your anticoagulant at the normal time, you can safely take your dose up until 12 midnight. But, if you miss a dose altogether, **do not take extra the next day**. Continue with your normal dose, make a note of the day missed and tell whoever checks your INR
- Only take the dose prescribed for you
- Never miss a dose
- Tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist who is checking your INR if you start to take any new medication
- Eat a balanced diet
- Carry your alert card with you at all times
- Remind your doctor, dentist or pharmacist that you are taking an anticoagulant.
- Avoid drinking cranberry juice

You should not :

- Take aspirin (or medicines with aspirin) unless prescribed by your doctor
- Take ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory medicines
- Drink more than the recommended amount of alcohol
- Miss a dose of anticoagulant unless advised to do so
- Take extra doses or change your dose unless advised to do so
- Run out of anticoagulation tablets



More information on these websites:

1. Heart Rhythm Alliance : <https://heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/uk>

1.1 Reference: Atrial Fibrillation Association (2022) *Warfarin and diet*. Available at: <https://api.heartrhythmalliance.org/files/download/fc9e05497bd59df48ef9507778ed7ef5> (Accessed: 22 December 2023)

2. Drink Aware : <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

2.2 Reference: www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/alcoholic-drinks-and-units/latest-uk-alcohol-unit-guidance (Accessed: 22 December 2023)

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk



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