

## **WARFARIN**

It is a type of medication called an anticoagulant which is also known as a “blood thinner”.

It is used to treat blood clots and help to prevent future blood clots if you have had one previously from either a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) or a Pulmonary Embolism (PE).

It is also used to reduce the risk of a blood clots forming if you have:

- An irregular heartbeat (atrial fibrillation)
- A replacement or mechanical heart valve
- A blood clotting disorder (thrombophilia)
- A higher chance of a blood clot following an operation

Your dose of Warfarin can be made up of a combination of different strengths and this dose is derived from your regular INR blood test which is usually carried out at the QE2 Anticoagulation Clinic.

You can receive telephone advice from the Anticoagulation Clinic, Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm on 01707 247 588.

Once your blood test results are stable you may only need an INR blood test every 12 weeks through the Anticoagulation Clinic, this may change if your dose is altered, you start new medications or if you are ill.

You will need a yearly blood test for your Full Blood Count (FBC), Liver Function Test (LFT) and a Kidney Function Test (U&Es).

### **Yellow Book and Alert Card**

You will be given a yellow book about anticoagulant medications, which explains your treatment and also allows you to keep a record of your INR results and warfarin dose.

You should take this book to all of your warfarin and GP appointments.

You will be given an alert card, which you should carry on your person at all times. It lets healthcare professionals know that you are taking an anticoagulant medication which can be helpful to know in case of an emergency.

You should also let healthcare professionals know before any treatment (medical or dental), vaccinations or prescribing of medication that you currently take Warfarin.

If you lose either of these please ask the pharmacy or anticoagulation clinic for another one.

### **Serious Side Effects**

Call 111 immediately if you have:

- Red pee
- Black poo
- Bruises that happen for no reason
- Bruises that are larger than you'd expect or that keep growing in size

Call 999 or go to A&E immediately if you get:

- Nosebleeds that you cannot stop and last longer than 10 minutes
- Blood in your vomit
- Coughing up blood
- Severe headaches
- Bleeding from any cut or injury that will not stop or slow down
- Seizures or fits
- Sudden loss of vision
- Blurred vision
- Numbness or tingling in your arms or legs

(You may also feel tired, weak or sick)

## **Cautions**

While warfarin has enormous benefits, the downside is that it can make you bleed more than normal.

This is because while you're taking warfarin, your blood will not clot as easily.

Apart from the risk of bleeding, warfarin is a very safe medicine. It's safe to take for a long time, even many years.

Do not drink cranberry or grapefruit juice while you're taking warfarin.

It can increase the effect of your medicine and put you at higher risk of bleeding.

Foods containing a lot of vitamin K can affect how warfarin works.

These include:

- green leafy vegetables, including broccoli, spinach and lettuce
- chickpeas
- liver
- egg yolks
- mature cheese and blue cheese
- avocado
- olive oil

It's important that you eat foods containing vitamin K, so rather than leaving them out of your diet, make sure you eat similar amounts of them regularly.

This will mean the level of vitamin K in your blood stays fairly constant and makes it more likely that your INR level stays stable.

Many medicines and supplements can affect warfarin. This can make you more likely to bleed.

You might need a blood test to check the other medicine is not affecting how your blood clots.

Tell your doctor if you're taking any of these medicines before you start taking warfarin:

- medicines for heart problems, such as amiodarone, quinidine or propafenone
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen or aspirin
- cholesterol-lowering medicines, such as bezafibrate, gemfibrozil, clofibrate or cholestyramine
- antibiotics, such as erythromycin, co-trimoxazole or norfloxacin
- miconazole gel for fungal infections like thrush

Do not take St John's wort, it can increase the risk of side effects.

Do not take aspirin or ibuprofen while you're taking warfarin unless a doctor has said it's OK. They increase the chance of bleeding.

You can take paracetamol while on warfarin, but taking more than four, 500mg tablets over 24 hours for longer than a few days can cause your blood to clot more slowly, therefore increasing the chance of bleeding.

Please speak to your pharmacist or doctor if you are taking any other medicines, including herbal remedies, vitamins or supplements.

## **Pregnancy and Breastfeeding**

Warfarin is not recommended in pregnancy as it can sometimes cause birth defects and bleeding problems.

However, if you have a metal heart valve you may be advised to continue taking warfarin in pregnancy because the risk of the valve clotting is greater than the risk to the baby. This would always be under the supervision of a specialist doctor.

Please speak to your doctor if you are planning a pregnancy or become pregnant whilst taking this medication.

If your doctor or midwife says your baby is healthy, it's OK to take warfarin while breastfeeding.

Talk to your health visitor, midwife, pharmacist or doctor as soon as possible if:

- your baby is not feeding as well as usual
- your baby seems to bleed or bruise easily
- you have any other concerns about your baby