

Anticoagulation Program

This program is designed to help our rostered patients deal with anticoagulation therapy.

Why have I been put on Warfarin (Coumadin)?

The simplest answer is that you are on medication to reduce the likelihood of blood clots. A blood clot can close up a blood vessel and block the flow of blood to any organ, including your heart and brain.

You may be on anticoagulants because you have:

- atrial fibrillation or an abnormal rhythm of the heart
- heart problems
- had a blood clot develop
- had a heart valve replacement
- had surgery, or a fracture, or on reduced activity

Anticoagulant drugs such as Warfarin (Coumadin) reduce the amount of blood clotting factors your body produces. That means that your blood takes longer to clot and is less likely to form blood clots.

These drugs may be prescribed on a long-term basis for chronic blood clotting issues or on a short-term basis for those who have had surgeries, such as knee or hip replacements.

There is a careful balancing act between preventing blood clotting and causing bleeding. That's why we have an Anticoagulation Program.

How will the program help me?

The Anticoagulation Program has been designed to help you balance your medication by:

- Educating you on the medication, its side effects and interactions, as well as lifestyle and diet
- Monitoring your blood work results
- Adjusting your medication as necessary

How do I become part of the program?

You will be referred to the program by your doctor or nurse practitioner, usually when you are first prescribed Warfarin. You will be contacted to attend an initial assessment with the INR Nurse, where you will be advised how to take your medication and how often your INR will need to be tested.

What is INR?

The International Normalized Ratio (INR) measures how quickly your blood clots. Anticoagulants slow down that the time.

INR must be monitored on a regular basis to maintain a balance between preventing clots and causing excessive bleeding. Your medication will be regulated to keep your INR in an optimum range.

INR is a routine blood test done here at our lab. The INR Nurse will book your appointments.

How often will my INR be tested?

The frequency of the blood tests will be set by the INR Nurse, depending upon how long you have been in the program and how stable your INR level has been in the past. Blood tests may begin daily or weekly and then, once your levels have stabilized, up to every four weeks.

The nurse will call you and let you know if your INR is in range or out of range. The INR nurse will

advise you if you need to adjust your medication dosage.

What can affect my INR?

1. **Stress**
2. **Alcohol** – check with your doctor, nurse practitioner or INR Nurse
3. **Antibiotics and over the counter medications**, like aspirin and Tylenol
4. **Alternative medicines**, including herbal teas, vitamins or special diets
5. **Diet changes**. Foods that contain **Vitamin K** (beef and pork liver, green tea, broccoli, chickpeas, kale, turnip, greens, and soybean products) can affect your INR. These foods can be part of a healthy balanced diet. Avoid large changes in your normal eating patterns.
6. **Illness**, like a virus or bacterial infection, vomiting, diarrhea or nausea lasting more than 24 hours or congestive heart failure. Notify the INR Nurse.

Advise the INR Nurse if any of the above has changed.

What if I forget to take my Warfarin?

Take it as soon as you remember. If you don't realize until the next day, take only the next dose. **NEVER DOUBLE DOSE!** Advise your INR Nurse.

What are the side-effects?

Minor side effects may include mild nausea, loose or hard stools, until your body adjusts to Warfarin.

The main side effect is bleeding. If you accidentally cut yourself, it may take longer to stop the bleeding. Put direct pressure on the cut. If the bleeding does not stop, call your doctor.

Call your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Red or dark brown urine
- Red blood or black colour in your stool
- Severe headache
- Vomiting or coughing up blood
- Unusual weakness
- Excessive menstrual bleeding or unexpected bleeding from the vagina
- Bleeding from cuts that does not stop
- Prolonged bleeding from gums
- Dizziness, trouble breathing or chest pain
- Unusual pain, swelling or bruising
- Dark, purplish or mottled fingers or toes
- Nose bleeds
- Or if you become pregnant

What else should I do?

Alert specialists, emergency room physicians, dentists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, chiropractors etc. that you are on Warfarin.

Use a soft toothbrush and floss gently. Take extra care when shaving. Avoid contact sports like football, hockey or rugby while on Warfarin.

Before going on a trip, let your INR Nurse know and ensure you have enough medication. Take a copy of your prescription with you. Carry your medication with you and do not put it in a checked bag. Try to maintain your eating and activity level as close to normal as possible.