

## **Thrombosis and Anticoagulation Team**

# **Warfarin**

**Information for patients,  
relatives and carers.**

## What is warfarin?

Warfarin is an anticoagulant. Anticoagulants are drugs which prevent harmful blood clots forming in your blood vessels. They do this by slowing down the clotting process.

## Are there any side effects?

Some people experience nausea and diarrhoea in the first few days of starting warfarin. If this does not pass after a few days, please contact your GP as you may need to change medication.

There is an increased risk of bruising and bleeding with warfarin. Warfarin does not cause bleeding, but will make any bleeding you do have more apparent. However, if your warfarin tests remain well controlled within the target range, then the risk of serious bleeding is low.

Please report any possible side effects to the anticoagulant service or to your GP as soon as possible. If you notice signs of internal bleeding you must seek **immediate** medical advice through 999, 111 or your GP surgery. These symptoms may include:

- Nose bleeds (longer than 10 minutes)
- Blood in stools or black stools
- Blood in vomit or sputum (spit)
- Severe new headache or symptoms of stroke:
  - Face** – if your face has dropped on one side, if you cannot smile or your mouth or eye has drooped.
  - Arms** – can you lift both arms and keep them there?
  - Speech** - may be slurred or garbled, or you may not be able to talk at all despite appearing to be awake.
  - Time** – it is time to dial 999 immediately if you notice any of these signs or symptoms of stroke.

## **Head injury / bump to the head**

Minor head injuries are very common and most are harmless or result in minor bruising. Some head injuries are more serious and you should always seek emergency advice if you black out or have a nasty injury. Rarely, even minor head injuries can trigger bleeding into the brain on warfarin. The 'flagging' symptoms to watch out for are listed below. If you have any of these symptoms, either immediately or weeks down the line, you must seek emergency advice and let the person you are speaking to know that you are on warfarin.

'Flagging' symptoms to look out for after a head injury include:

- Drowsiness
- Feeling dizzy when walking or standing up
- Vomiting
- Worsening headaches
- Problems with vision such as blurring
- Changes in behaviour
- Fits/convulsions

### **Other injuries**

If you have minor signs of bruising or bleeding and your next test is in two to three days, please inform us at the time of the blood test by writing on the test slip or telephoning us before you come for the test.

## **How long will I need to take the warfarin for?**

This will depend on why we have prescribed it for you. Your doctor or anticoagulant practitioner will usually discuss this with you at the start of treatment. If you are unsure, please ask. Some people require

treatment for a few months, others will need it indefinitely.

## What dose of warfarin should I take?

This varies from patient to patient and the dose you start on may be higher or lower than the dose you need later. Your dose will depend on the results of a regular blood clotting test.

Your blood clotting is measured by a test called an International Normalised Ratio (INR). The higher the INR, the longer it takes your blood to clot. Your doctor or anticoagulant practitioner will tell you your desired INR range.

When on warfarin you should be given a dosage slip stating the dose to be taken each day. This will be written in milligrams (mg) per day. We use 1mg (brown) and 3mg (blue) warfarin tablets and your dose will be made up of a combination of these. For example, 5mg = one blue + two brown tablets.

You will need to obtain repeat prescriptions from your GP, rather than the hospital. Please re-order when you still have at least a week's worth of tablets left to ensure you do not run out.

## What if I forget a dose?

Take your warfarin at the same time every day, ideally around 6pm. This regular time will help you to remember it. Explore different ways to remember such as setting an alarm, using a dosette box or writing on a calendar or in a diary. If you have a smartphone, there are apps that you can download that may help you.

If you forget to take your warfarin in the early evening but remember later that night, take it then. If you do not remember until the following day then miss that dose and let us know at your next INR test by writing on your form. If you forget more than three doses of warfarin,

please phone the clinic for advice.

## Where can I have my INR blood test?

There are walk-in phlebotomy departments at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital (Winchester), Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital and in Outpatients at Andover War Memorial Hospital. All are open Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 4.30pm. You can also telephone [01256 314751](tel:01256314751) to book an appointment at these locations.

Alternatively, you may wish to contact your doctor's surgery to see if you can make an appointment to have your blood test taken there.

If you are housebound, please arrange with your doctor's surgery for a community nurse to visit.

**Please try to have your blood taken in the morning** so that if your INR is high or low we can get in touch with you before you have taken your evening dose. **Please avoid going for your blood test on a Friday** (unless specifically requested by us) as we are unlikely to see the result until after the weekend.

## How often will I need to have an INR blood test?

You will need to have weekly/ twice weekly INR tests when you first start warfarin. As your INRs become more stable, blood tests will be less frequent, up to a maximum of 12 week intervals.

It is very important that you have regular tests to check the dose you need. If you are unable to have a test on the date specified on your slip, then a test a day or so either side is fine and there is no need to tell us. However, if you are having weekly (or more frequent) tests and you are new to warfarin, please call us as it is important to time the dose changes and test dates appropriately.

## When will I find out the result of my INR blood test?

You should receive a dosage advice slip in the post within **five working** days.

- If we need you to urgently change your dose, we will call you on the day of your test or the following working day.
- If you **do not** get a call from us by 5pm on the day of your test please continue on your current dose and make any advised dose change as soon as you receive your new slip.
- If your slip has not arrived a week after your test, please telephone us.

**It is vital that we have a reliable telephone number that we can use to contact you. If you do not have a telephone please give us the number of a friend, relative or neighbour who will be certain to pass on any message from us.**

Please remember to hand in the tear off slip at the bottom of your dosage advice slip at each INR blood test to ensure your result is forwarded to us. **Please complete the blood test request form** by answering yes or no to the questions so we can be informed to safely dose your warfarin.

## Can other medicines or what I eat/ drink affect my warfarin?

You should eat a well balanced diet and avoid significant changes to your diet unless advised by your doctor. Do not crash diet. However, there are no specific foods that should be avoided.

If you drink alcohol, drink only moderate amounts and avoid binge drinking as this often causes your INR to rise.

Seek advice from a pharmacist when buying over the counter medicines and tell them you are taking warfarin. Please also inform any doctor who is prescribing or making changes to your other medications.

Do not take aspirin or medicines containing aspirin unless prescribed by your doctor.

Please tell us about any changes in medication, even if they are temporary such as antibiotics and steroids. We also need to know if you become ill for more than 48 hours (for example, have diarrhoea and vomiting) as you may need a blood test sooner than stated on your blue slip. As a general principle we will encourage you to have an INR test 3 - 5 days after any significant health problem or medication change. A repeat test is particularly important if you have recently been discharged from hospital.

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

Warfarin taken after eight weeks of pregnancy may damage the unborn baby. Do not plan to become pregnant without consulting your doctor. If you think you may be pregnant while taking warfarin please contact your doctor at once.

## **How can I contact the Anticoagulant Practitioners?**

We are available Monday to Friday (except bank holidays) from 9.30am to 4.30pm.

Telephone: [01256 313295](tel:01256313295) or [01962 825624](tel:01962825624).

There are answer phones on both numbers if we are busy. If you leave us a message, we will try to call you back the same working day. Please clearly state your first name, surname, date of birth and NHS number (on your slip) and the reason for your call. Please allow up to 5 working

days for your slip to arrive but please call us if it hasn't arrived a week after your blood test.

Non-urgent information can be communicated to us using the bottom part of your dosage slip (see below). Please let us know if any pre-booked holidays so we can try to avoid asking you for a blood test whilst you are away.

Our email address is:

[bnh-ft.anticoagclinic@nhs.net](mailto:bnh-ft.anticoagclinic@nhs.net)

Please note that email is not secure and we will only access our emails during the working day so do not use email to contact us with urgent enquiries or information.

Hampshire Hospitals  <small>NHS Foundation Trust</small>		ANTICOAGULANT SERVICE REQUEST FORM	
<b>Please arrange for your next test to be on the</b>			
First Name SURNAME			
My house, My Street			
My Town			
Hampshire			
SO99 9XX			
			
Hospital Number		1272341999	
NHS number		-	
D.O.B. ...		-	
Tel No ...		99999 999999	
A/C drug		1mg Whole Warfarin	
Diagnosis:		Other please specify	
Target INR: 2.5		Range: 2.0-3.0	
Doctor		Not Allocated	
Surgery		Not Allocated	
Please give details and dates of any changes in:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medication</li><li>• Hospital stays</li><li>• Missed anticoagulant doses</li><li>• Unusual bleeding/bruising</li><li>• Mini stroke</li><li>• Other</li></ul>			
Laboratory Number:		Blood Collection Date & Time:	

## Warfarin summary checklist

### You should:

- Report signs of bleeding and bruising.
- Have blood tests **in the morning** of the date advised and send the bottom part of the blue slip with your blood. Avoid having your blood tests on a Friday unless specifically requested by us.
- Take your warfarin at the same time each day, preferably around 6pm.
- Take the dose advised by the anticoagulant practitioners.
- Inform the clinic of any changes to your other medications.
- Eat a normal balanced diet.
- Carry your anticoagulant alert card with you.
- Make sure the clinic has an up to date address and telephone number for you.

### You should not:

- Take aspirin or medicines containing aspirin unless prescribed by your doctor.
- Crash diet or drink more than a moderate amount of alcohol.
- Miss a dose of warfarin, take extra doses or change your dose without first discussing with the anticoagulant practitioners
- Run out of warfarin tablets. Ask your family doctor (GP) for a repeat prescription in good time.

## Be aware:



Tell your dentist and other healthcare professionals who treat you that you are taking warfarin



If you think you may be pregnant whilst taking warfarin, contact your doctor at once



Tell the clinic of any changes of address, telephone number and/or doctors' surgery.

You should see your GP once a year for a review to check that warfarin is appropriate for you.

You will be notified by post of your results - please allow up to five working days for your slip to arrive. Try to avoid having your INR blood tests done in the afternoons and on a Friday as this will cause a delay in us passing your results to you.

**This leaflet is available in other formats,  
including large print and Easy Read  
from the customer care team**  
(telephone [01256 486766](tel:01256486766) or email  
[customercare@hhft.nhs.uk](mailto:customercare@hhft.nhs.uk))

[www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk)