## Diet

Eat a balanced diet with all kinds of foods, but not too much fat (*for example, only eat corned beef or mutton once a week*) or large amounts of foods that contain vitamin K (*for example, spinach, broccoli, lettuce, soya beans, cabbage, beef liver, alfalfa, wheat bran and green tea*). Vitamin K can stop warfarin from working.

**Before making any changes to your diet talk to your health professional**.

**Alcohol - not more than 2 standard drinks per day** *A standard drink is 300ml (one can) ordinary-strength beer, 60ml (2 singles) sherry, port , 100ml (half a glass) table wine, 30ml (single) of spirits.*

More than 2 drinks per day can increase (↑) the risk of bleeding.

## Pregnancy

Talk to your doctor if you take warfarin and think you might be pregnant, or want to have a baby.

Warfarin can cause birth defects if taken in pregnancy. Heparin, another medicine, may be used instead of warfarin.

## Breastfeeding

Warfarin is safe to use if you are breastfeeding.

## What else do I need to know?

Always tell all health practitioners (for example, your doctor, pharmacist or physiotherapist) that you take warfarin.

Tell your dentist that you are taking warfarin before your appointment, and use a soft toothbrush if your gums bleed easily.

Avoid activities where you might get hurt easily and bleed too much (for example, contact sport).

Do not get new tattoos or piercing.

Do not have body massage as it may cause bruising.

## You can get more information from:

Your pharmacist and doctor or the website:
www.medsafe.govt.nz

## Checklist on discharge from hospital

- □ **Warfarin book**
- □ **Discharge Prescription**
- □ **Laboratory Form**
- □ **You know what dose of warfarin to take**

**April 06**

# Warfarin

## What you need to know

Waitemata District Health Board
Te Wai Awhina

## What is warfarin?

Warfarin is a prescription medicine that helps stop the blood from clotting (coagulating). It's called an anti-coagulant. The brand of warfarin called Marevan® is usually used. There is another brand of warfarin called Coumadin®, which cannot be used at the same time as Marevan.

**Talk to your pharmacist if anything looks different.**

## Why you need warfarin?

You need warfarin because you have (or may get) a clot. Clots can be harmful if they block the blood flow in an artery or vein.

A deep vein clot (often the leg) is called a Deep Vein Thrombosis or DVT, in the lung it is called a Pulmonary Embolism or PE.

If your heart beats irregularly (called Atrial Fibrillation or AF), the blood flow can be slowed and a clot can develop and cause a stroke. Blood clots in the heart can cause a heart attack.

## What makes clots more likely to happen?

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

## Regular Blood tests

You will need to have blood tests. The blood test measures the speed of blood clotting and is called the **INR** (International Normalised Ratio). The INR should be anywhere between 2 and 4.

**Your doctor will tell you what INR you should be aiming for, what warfarin dose you need, and 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 when necessary, to take to a laboratory.

## On the day you get your blood tested:

1. Have your blood test in the morning
2. Ring in the afternoon for the result. The nurse or doctor will tell you what dose to take in the evening. Take the dose in the evening, and record that you have taken the dose.

## When should I take my tablets?

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

Mark the calendar when you have taken your dose, or use a medication organiser.

Warfarin can be taken with or without food.

## What should I do if I forget a dose?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember **if** it is on the same day. However if you do not remember until the following day, only take the dose you would take on that day, as you should **never** take more than one dose a day.

**Tell your doctor about missed doses.**

## How long do I need to take warfarin for?

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

## Other medicines, 'over the counter' and alternative treatments

A lot of treatments can change how warfarin works. (for example, many antibiotics and treatments for arthritis can increase the risk of bleeding). Even St John's wort, gingko, ginseng, dong quai, cranberry juice and ginger can change warfarin.

**Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines and alternative treatments you take.**

## Call a doctor immediately if you have:

- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Fever, infection
- Vomiting, diarrhoea
- Unexplained pain
- Loss of appetite for 2-3 days
- Blood in urine or faeces (black bowel
- motions)
- Changes to your skin (for example, a rash or itching)