

# Anticoagulation Therapy

*“Anti” means “against” and “coagulation” refers to blood clotting. An anticoagulant helps reduce the risk of clots forming in the blood. Because anticoagulants change the properties of the blood, this kind of medication therapy must be regulated and supervised by Anticoagulation Clinic staff.*

## Expertise in Matters of the Heart

Physicians prescribe anticoagulation medication to lengthen the time it takes for a clot to form in the blood. Anticoagulants will not break up existing clots, but they can keep them from getting larger. With the use of anticoagulation therapy, complications from a blood clot can be avoided.

Anticoagulants, such as Coumadin, Jantoven or the generic equivalent Warfarin, are prescribed for patients who are especially at risk for forming blood clots due to:

- an irregular heart rhythm (Atrial Fibrillation)
- a mechanical heart valve
- heart attack
- stroke
- pulmonary embolus
- congestive heart failure
- a history of blood clots

### Taking anticoagulants:

- Make sure you are taking the right dose. Replace old information with new information when the Anticoagulation Clinic adjusts your doses.
- When you divide a pill, be sure to break it on the line.
- Take the dose exactly as prescribed at the same time every day. If you forget a day, inform your doctor, but DO NOT take an extra dose to “catch up.”



- Never adjust your own dose.
- Cross off days on the calendar as a helpful reminder.
- If you take Warfarin, be sure that your medication comes from the same manufacturer every time. Pills should look the same at every refill. If there is a difference, ask your pharmacist.
- Wear a Medic-Alert bracelet or other identification stating that you take Coumadin.
- Inform dentists, podiatrists, etc. that you are an anticoagulation patient.

### Monitoring anticoagulants:

A protime test shows the effect of anticoagulants on the blood by measuring INR, International Normalized Ratio. A low INR means the blood clots too quickly, while a high INR means it takes too long to clot, making it possible to bleed easily.

When patients begin anticoagulation therapy, frequent testing is required to regulate the dose. After appropriate levels have been reached, testing

occurs less frequently, although patients can never go longer than 8 weeks between tests.

Protime testing is done using a finger stick at Heart Center of the Rockies Anticoagulation Clinic. A 5-10 minute appointment is required and results are available immediately. Clinic nurses may provide new instructions and dosage information after each visit. Any Coumadin-related problems or concerns may be discussed with the nurse at this time.

**To schedule, reschedule or cancel an appointment for a finger stick test, please call (970) 221-1000.**

### Interactions

Anticoagulants are affected by many common foods, supplements and medications. Familiarizing yourself with these interactions may help you avoid dangerous situations.

**Drug-drug:** When starting any new prescription or over-the-counter medication, please alert your doctor and Anticoagulation Clinic nurse. Please notify the Anticoagulation Clinic immediately if you are prescribed Coreg, Pacerone or prednisone. Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve). For pain relief, acetaminophen (Tylenol) is recommended.

*Heart Center of the Rockies, the region's premier heart center, is dedicated to providing a comprehensive program of advanced cardiovascular care throughout Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska.*

**Drug-food:** Dark leafy greens contain numerous heart-healthy nutrients such as fiber, folic acid, vitamin A, vitamin C, potassium, calcium, and iron, as well as vitamin K. Vitamin K is an essential nutrient in the process of how our blood clots. If you take medication to thin your blood, it is NOT necessary to avoid dark leafy green vegetables because of their vitamin K content. However, it is important to be CONSISTENT with how much and how often you include these nutritious vegetables in your diet.

**Drug-alcohol:** Alcohol interacts with Coumadin and will increase your INR. Consume only in moderation or abstain.

**Drug-herb:** Please provide a list of all herbal supplements to the Anticoagulation Clinic nurse. Many can increase your risk of bleeding, so you are advised to not use herbal supplements while taking Coumadin.

**Common side effects:** You may notice common side effects while using an anticoagulant. If these symptoms become extreme, notify the Anticoagulation Clinic immediately.

- Bleeding gums when brushing your teeth. This should stop when you rinse your mouth. We recommend using a soft toothbrush.
- Easily bruised skin.
- Occasional nosebleeds. Apply pinching pressure below the bony bridge of your nose for 5-10 minutes and the bleeding should stop.
- Longer bleeding after a cut. Hold pressure on the cut for 5-10 minutes and the bleeding should stop.

- Menstruating women may have heavier periods. You must not become pregnant while taking Coumadin.

**Severe side effects:** Certain side effects are cause for alarm. Mild versions of these side effects may be treated by the Anticoagulation Clinic nurse, but severe symptoms should be treated at the nearest Emergency Room.

- Coughing up blood
- Blood in the stool or urine (stool may appear red, black or tarry)
- Severe bleeding in the whites of the eyes
- Any bleeding that is severe or excessive

**Call 911 immediately if you experience symptoms of a blood clot:**

- Sudden weakness or paralysis in any limb
- Visual changes
- Sudden onset of slurred speech or inability to speak
- Sudden, severe pain and swelling in arm or leg
- Sudden, severe chest pain or shortness of breath

#### **Lovenox Therapy**

Many patients who take Coumadin may need to take Lovenox injections at some time, either when first starting Coumadin or when coming off Coumadin for surgery or other invasive procedures, such as angiograms or pacemaker placement. This is referred to as "bridging."

Lovenox is given by injection under the skin (subcutaneously). Your nurse will

teach you or your caregiver how to give the injections.

Lovenox injections are based on your weight and are given twice a day. The Lovenox is often given along with Coumadin. You will need to continue your Lovenox until your physician or Anticoagulation Clinic nurse instructs you to discontinue use. Please contact the clinic for a refill of your Lovenox if you run out of the medication before you are instructed to stop the injections.

Common side effects of Lovenox include irritation at the site of injection, such as pain, and bruising. Notify your physician or Anticoagulation Clinic nurse right away if you experience any bleeding symptoms such as those listed in the previous section for Coumadin.

#### **Anticoagulation Clinics**

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