

Patient information

Anticoagulants

What are anticoagulants?

These are medicines that help to prevent blood clots. They are given to people who are at a high risk of getting clots as well as people who have developed blood clots. These medicines include direct anticoagulants (DOAC) (e.g. Rivaroxaban, Apixaban, Dabigatran and Edoxaban) and Warfarin.

Why am I taking anticoagulants and what dose should I take?

You should take anticoagulants if it has been recommended by a doctor. In most cases it depends on where clot forms, which can lead to serious problems such as strokes, heart attacks, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism. You could be asked to take anticoagulants if you have conditions such as atrial fibrillation that can cause blood clots to form. Your prescribing clinician will explain your dose in detail. Doses vary from one patient to another. Please follow your doctor's advice.

How long will I need to take anticoagulants for?

The length of time you need to take your medicine depends on why it's been prescribed. The clinician will discuss this with you when you start the treatment. In some cases, it could be three months while others will need to continue anticoagulants lifelong.

Are there any side effects associated with anticoagulants?

The main side effect is that you can bleed or bruise easily. Please contact your GP if you experience any of the following:

- passing blood in your urine
- passing blood when you poo or having black poo
- severe bruising
- prolonged nosebleeds (more than 10 minutes)
- bleeding gums
- blood in vomit or sputum
- prolonged bleeding from cuts
- heavy periods in women
- unusual headaches
- High chance of internal bleeding after injuries such as a head injury

Some patients experience nausea, diarrhea, and/or heartburn.

Are blood tests needed to monitor the anticoagulants?

- Unlike DOACs, Warfarin needs regular blood tests for monitoring and your doctor will arrange this. DOACs do not need regular blood tests but you will need a blood test to check your kidney function, liver function and a full blood count before starting treatment.

- These tests need to be repeated at least annually but possibly as often as every 12 weeks.
- If you develop issues with your kidneys such as kidney infection or abnormal kidney blood tests, your doctor may need to reduce your DOAC dose.

What about taking other medicines?

- Your medicines will be reviewed before you start an anticoagulant, and any necessary changes will be made.
- As other medicines may interact with anticoagulants, it is important you check with a pharmacist before starting any additional medicines or before stopping any existing ones.
- Please let other healthcare professionals treating you know that you are taking an anticoagulant, for example, your dentist.

Dos and Don'ts of anticoagulants:

You should:

- report if you have a head injury
- report signs of bleeding and bruising
- have blood tests as requested by the surgery
- take your Warfarin once a day usually in the evening and take your dose at the same time each day before, during or after a meal.
- take your DOAC with food and a glass of water (swallow whole tablet, do not crush), take the dose prescribed at the same time(s) each day
- eat a normal healthy diet
- carry your anticoagulant alert card with you
- attend all medical review appointments

You should not:

- take aspirin or medicines containing aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like diclofenac or ibuprofen/nurofen unless prescribed for you
- miss a dose of anticoagulant unless advised by a clinician
- take an extra dose of anticoagulant
- run out of tablets, ensure you have a repeat prescription available.
- Do not stop taking anticoagulant without discussing it with your doctor first

Can I do contact sports?

If you are involved in contact sport, discuss this with your doctor.

Can I drink alcohol with anticoagulants?

Alcohol (in those who drink heavily) potentially decreases the anticoagulant effect of Warfarin. DOACs do not interact with alcohol. However, you should always drink in moderation and stay within the recommended guidelines.

What should I do if I take too much anticoagulants?

Notify your doctor right away or visit the nearest Accident and Emergency Department. Carry the medication pack with you, even in the absence of any tablets inside it.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss an anticoagulant dose, take it as soon as you remember unless it's almost time for the next dose, then skip it. Never double up and consult your doctor if unsure or for any concerns about side effects.

What should I do if I keep forgetting my anticoagulant tablets?

If you frequently forget your anticoagulant tablets, consider setting reminders (e.g. phone alarms or medication apps), using a pill organizer, or associating the dose with a daily routine (like meals). If you continue to struggle, speak with your doctor about alternative options or adjustments to your medication regimen. Missing your tablets will increase your risk of having a stroke, heart attack or another clot.

What happens if I need dental treatment or an operation whilst I am taking an anticoagulant?

If you need dental treatment or surgery while taking anticoagulants, inform your dentist or surgeon in advance. They may adjust your medication or plan special precautions to reduce the risk of bleeding.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding while on anticoagulants, consult your doctor as some may need to be switched to safer alternatives.

Where can I get more advice?

- ✦ Contact the hospital team involved in anticoagulants prescription/management.
- ✦ The NHS website (www.nhs.uk) provides online health information and guidance.
- ✦ The NHS 111 phone line offers medical help and advice from trained advisors 24 hours a day. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
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The directorate group that has agreed this patient information leaflet:
URGENT CARE

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