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Wolters Kluwer

Patient education: Taking medicines for blood clots (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is a blood clot?

Normally, your body is protected from bleeding because your blood vessels seal over after an injury. The seal is made by proteins and cells in the blood. Sometimes, these proteins and cells form a "clot" inside a blood vessel. Blood clots can be dangerous because they can stop blood from flowing. They can also break off and travel in the bloodstream to another part of the body, like the brain or the lungs.

Medicines used for blood clots are also known as "anticoagulants" or "blood thinners." They do not actually thin the blood. They just make the blood less likely to form clots.

You might be prescribed 1 of these medicines for either of the following reasons:

- You had a blood clot – Medicine helps stop the clot from getting worse.
- Your risk of a blood clot is high – Medicine helps prevent new clots from forming.

There are several medicines that can be used, including many that can be taken as a pill. These include:

- [Apixaban](#) (brand name: Eliquis)
- [Dabigatran](#) (brand name: Pradaxa)
- [Edoxaban](#) (brand names: Savaysa, Lixiana)
- [Rivaroxaban](#) (brand name: Xarelto)
- [Warfarin](#) (brand name: Jantoven)

Each medicine is different. They have different doses. Some are taken once a day and some twice a day. Some are more expensive than others. And some are more affected by what you eat. The table answers some common questions about the differences ([table 1](#)).

How should I take my medicine?

It depends on which medicine you take. Your pills will come with specific instructions, and your doctor or pharmacist will talk to you about what you need to do. If you take [warfarin](#), you might also work with an "anticoagulation clinic." People taking warfarin need to have their blood checked, and sometimes their dose needs to be adjusted.

Below are some general tips:

- **Know the strength of your medicine and what the pills look like** – The strength of the medicine is given in milligrams ("mg"). If the color, shape, or strength of your pills looks different from those you have taken before, check with your doctor or pharmacist.
- **Take your medicine exactly as told** – Try to take your medicine at the same time each day (or at the same set of times, if you take it twice a day). In addition:
 - [Dabigatran](#) should be taken with a full glass of water after a meal.
 - In some cases, [rivaroxaban](#) should be taken with food.

Do not change your dose or stop your medicine without talking to your doctor. Always refill your prescription before you run out of pills.

If you forget or miss a dose, or accidentally take more than you were supposed to, call your doctor or anticoagulation clinic to find out what to do. The instructions that come with your medicine might tell you what to do if you miss a dose.

- **Use a pill box to stay organized** – Some people find it helpful to use a weekly pill box ([picture 1](#)). This can help you keep track of your medicine and make sure you take all your doses.

One exception is if you take [dabigatran](#). This medicine should **not** be stored in a pill box. You should always keep dabigatran pills in the original bottle or package they came in.

- **Get your blood tested** – If you take [warfarin](#), you will need to have your blood tested to check how your blood is clotting. This test is called a "PT and INR". This is important in order to make sure you get the correct dose of warfarin for you. Once you are on a regular

dose, you can have a PT and INR test less often, unless your diet changes, you get sick, or you start a new medicine.

If you take [apixaban](#), [dabigatran](#), [edoxaban](#), or [rivaroxaban](#), you will not need regular blood tests to check how the medicine is working. But your doctor might do a blood test once in a while to check your kidneys or liver.

- **Check before taking any new medicines** – Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or anticoagulation clinic before taking any new medicines. This includes prescription or over-the-counter medicines, herbs, and vitamins. Certain medicines and remedies can change the way some of these medicines work. In particular, a **lot** of medicines can affect the way [warfarin](#) works, especially [vitamin K](#). So it's very important to check before taking any new medicines or stopping any medicines you already take.

Do not use medicines that contain an "NSAID" for treating pain or fever unless you talk to your doctor first. NSAIDs are a group of medicines that includes [aspirin](#), [ibuprofen](#) (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin), and [naproxen](#) (sample brand names: Aleve, Naprosyn). They can increase your risk of bleeding, especially if combined with a medicine for blood clots.

Also, make sure every doctor knows that you take a medicine for blood clots and which one you take. That way, the doctor can check whether the new medicine might change the way it works.

- **Follow instructions about diet** – If you are taking [apixaban](#), [dabigatran](#), [edoxaban](#), or [rivaroxaban](#), there are not very many rules about diet.

If you take [warfarin](#), you will need to make sure to eat about the same amount of [vitamin K](#) from foods every day. Do not take vitamin K supplements unless your doctor tells you to. Vitamin K affects how warfarin works. Some leafy green and other vegetables are high in vitamin K. The table lists the amount of vitamin K in foods ([table 2](#)).

- **If you get sick, tell your doctor** – If you have vomiting, diarrhea, a fever, or an infection, or if you cannot eat, tell your doctor. If you take [warfarin](#), you might need a blood test and/or a change in dose. If you cannot keep down the pills, you might need a different type of medicine for blood clots that comes as a shot.
- **Wear a medical alert tag** – Always wear a bracelet, necklace, or alert tag (or carry a wallet card) that warns people that you take a medicine for blood clots and the name of the medicine. That way, if you are in an accident and are unable to explain your condition,

people will know how to care for you. Your alert tag should also have the name and phone number of an emergency contact person.

- **If you might get pregnant, talk to your doctor** – These medicines are not recommended during pregnancy. If you could get pregnant, talk to your doctor about birth control options. It's also important to tell your doctor right away if you get pregnant while taking one of these medicines.

What are the risks of these medicines?

The major risk is bleeding. It's important to protect yourself from getting injured.

Bleeding can happen after an injury, but sometimes bleeding happens without an injury. If you have any signs of bleeding, you should get treatment as soon as possible.

Get emergency help **right away** (in the US and Canada, you can **call 9-1-1**) if you:

- Have a serious accident, fall, hit your head, or get another serious injury that could cause bleeding.
- Throw up blood or something that looks like coffee grounds.
- Have a severe headache
- Have trouble talking, weakness, or loss of function of one of your arms or legs

Call your doctor **right away** if you:

- Took more medicine than you were supposed to.
- Have any of these signs of abnormal bleeding:
 - Feeling sick to your stomach
 - Blood in your bowel movements or dark-colored bowel movements
 - Headaches or dizziness
 - Nosebleeds or any bleeding that does not stop
 - Dark red or brown urine

You should also tell your doctor if you:

- Bleed from your gums after brushing your teeth
- Have heavy menstrual periods or bleeding between periods
- Have more bruising than usual after a minor injury
- Have diarrhea, vomit, or are unable to eat for more than 24 hours

- Have a fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C)
 - Cannot take your medicine for any reason
-

How can I lower my risk of bleeding?

You can:

- Avoid doing things that could lead to a fall, such as walking on slippery surfaces or climbing on a high stool.
- Avoid sports that might cause injury.
- Use care when handling sharp tools, or avoid them when possible. Examples of tools that could cause serious bleeding if they cut you are sharp knives, saws, and straight edge razors.
- Always use a seatbelt in the car, and wear a helmet if you ride a bicycle or motorcycle.
- Avoid drinking a lot of alcohol, which can increase your risk of bleeding. If you drink, limit yourself to no more than 1 to 2 servings per day. A serving is equal to 1 beer (12 ounces), 1 glass of wine (5 ounces), or 1 shot of liquor (1.5 ounces).
- If you need surgery, tell the surgeon you are taking a medicine to for blood clots, and tell them which one.
- If you see a new doctor, dentist, or nurse, let them know you are taking a medicine for blood clots, and tell them which one.

For more detailed information about your medicines, ask your doctor or nurse for the patient hand-out from Lexicomp available through UpToDate. It explains how to use each medicine, describes its possible side effects, and lists other medicines or foods that can affect how it works.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Choosing a medicine for blood clots \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Stroke \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Deep vein thrombosis \(blood clot in the legs\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Pulmonary embolism \(blood clot in the lungs\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Atrial fibrillation \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Medicines for atrial fibrillation \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Prosthetic valves \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Prothrombin time \(PT\) test and International Normalized Ratio \(INR\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Warfarin \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Deep vein thrombosis \(DVT\) \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Pulmonary embolism \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Oct 26, 2022.

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Topic 86638 Version 23.0

GRAPHICS

Common questions about the different oral medicines used to prevent or treat blood clots

	Warfarin (brand name: Jantoven)	Dabigatran (brand name: Pradaxa)	Apixaban (brand name: Eliquis), edoxaban (brand names: Savaysa, Lixiana), and rivaroxaban (brand name: Xarelto)
How often do I need to take it?	Once a day	Once or twice a day, depending on the reason for taking it	Apixaban: Once or twice a day, depending on the reason for taking it Edoxaban: Once a day Rivaroxaban: Once a day (some people may need to take it twice a day for the first 3 weeks)
Do I need regular blood tests?	Yes	No	No
Will the dose need to be adjusted?	Maybe, depending on the results of your blood tests	No – once you are on a stable dose, you do not need to adjust the dose	No – once you are on a stable dose, you do not need to adjust the dose
Could it cause serious bleeding?	Yes	Yes, but the risk might be less than with warfarin in many cases	Yes, but the risk might be less than with warfarin in many cases
Is there a medicine to reverse the effects if I have serious bleeding?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do I need to be careful about my diet while taking it?	Yes – you need to be careful to eat about the same amount of vitamin K every day	No	No, but: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you take apixaban, you will need to avoid

			<p>grapefruit and grapefruit juice, which can change the way the medicine works.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you take rivaroxaban for atrial fibrillation, you will need to take it with your evening meal. ▪ If you take rivaroxaban (for any reason) and the strength of your pills is 15 or 20 mg, you will need to take it with food.
What if I have kidney or liver disease?	Okay to take	Might need to avoid if you have severe kidney disease	Some people might need to avoid
What if I take other medicines?	Many medicines can affect the dose	A few medicines can affect the dose	A few medicines can affect the dose

These are some common questions about the different oral medicines used to prevent and treat blood clots. Your doctor can talk to you about which medicine makes the most sense for your situation.

Graphic 99882 Version 8.0

Pill box



A pill box has a section for each day of the week. It can help you avoid taking too much or too little of your medicines.

Reproduced from: Prescribing patterns change following direct marketing restrictions. News Release, May 2, 2017. National Institutes Health. Available at: <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/prescribing-patterns-change-following-direct-marketing-restrict> (Accessed on May 9, 2017).

Graphic 113044 Version 1.0

Amount of vitamin K in different foods

Vitamin K is found in healthy foods like leafy greens. Vitamin K helps blood to clot, so it can change the way warfarin works. This does NOT mean you need to stop eating foods with vitamin K.

Your goal is to eat about the same amount of vitamin K each day. You can do this by eating the same amount of high and medium level vitamin K foods each day using the list below.

If you are not able to eat for a few days or are making big changes in your diet, call your doctor.

Vitamin pills, herbs, or other supplements such as calcium soft chews can have vitamin K in them or can interact with warfarin. Always show your doctor the label of ALL vitamins, herbs, or other supplements that you take.

Food name	Serving size	Vitamin K (micrograms)
High vitamin K foods		
Brussels sprouts, fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	110
Brussels sprouts, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	150
Greens, beet fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	350
Greens, collard frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	530
Greens, collard fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	365
Greens, mustard fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	415
Greens, turnip fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	265
Greens, turnip frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	425
Kale, fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	530
Kale, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	565
Spinach, fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	444
Spinach, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	514
Spinach, fresh (raw)	1 cup	150
Medium vitamin K foods		
Asparagus, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	72
	4 spears	48
Asparagus, fresh (cooked, drained)	4 spears	30
Beans, green or yellow, fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	10
Broccoli, fresh (cooked, drained)	1 spear	26
Broccoli, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	80

Broccoli, raw	1/2 cup	45
Cabbage (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	80
Cabbage, chinese bok-choi (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	28
Cabbage, green (raw)	1/2 cup	26
Cabbage, red (raw)	1/2 cup	14
Cabbage, savoy (raw)	1/2 cup	24
Calcium soft chews (brand name Viactiv with D) see above about other vitamin pills	1 chew	40
Carrots, fresh or frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	10
Cauliflower, fresh or frozen (raw or cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	10
Celery, raw	1/2 cup	17
Coleslaw (fast food-type)	1/2 cup	37
Endive	1/2 cup	60
Lettuce (butterhead, Boston, bibb)	1/2 head	80
Lettuce (iceberg, crisphead)	1/2 head	65
Lettuce (romaine, cos)	1 cup	57
Lettuce (green leaf)	1 cup	97
Oil, canola	1 tablespoon	17
Okra, fresh (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	32
Okra, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	44
Peas, frozen, with pod (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	24
Peas, fresh, with pod (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	20
Peas, green, frozen (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	18
Pickle relish, sweet	1 tablespoon	13
Pickles, cucumber dill or kosher dill	1 pickle	25
Sauerkraut, canned	1/2 cup	56
Vegetables, mixed frozen or canned (cooked, drained)	1/2 cup	20
Low vitamin K foods		
Avocado	1 ounce	All of these foods have less than 10 micrograms of vitamin K per serving
Bananas	1 banana	
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans)	1/2 cup	

Corn	1/2 cup	
Fruit (fresh, frozen or canned including apples, nectarines, peaches, watermelon)	Whole piece of fresh fruit, 1 wedge of watermelon, or 1/2 cup	
Mayonaise	1 tablespoon	
Oil, olive	1 tablespoon	
Oil, other (including peanut, sesame, safflower, corn, sunflower, soybean)	1 tablespoon	
Peppers, green or red	1/2 pepper or 1/2 cup	
Potatoes	1 potato or 1/2 cup	
Seaweed, kelp (raw)	1 tablespoon	
Tomatoes	1 tomato or 1/2 cup	
Very low vitamin K foods, but MIGHT change how warfarin or other medicines work		
Cranberry juice	4 ounces juice	If you eat these foods, limit the amount to one or two servings per day
Grapefruit	4 ounces juice	
	1/2 grapefruit	
Green tea, brewed	4 ounces	

Data from: US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. 2013. USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 25. Nutrient Data Laboratory Home Page, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/nutrientdata>. Accessed August 7, 2013.

Graphic 65279 Version 2.0