

Going Home on Blood Thinners (Patient Education - Disease and Procedure)

Patient Education

Going Home on Blood Thinners

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You must carefully read the "Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer" below in order to understand and correctly use this information

About this topic

You are on a drug that keeps your blood from clotting normally to prevent blood clots. It may also keep clots you already have from getting bigger and moving to some other part of your body. While you are on this drug you will need to take extra care to keep yourself safe. If you start to bleed, it can be very serious. You should get help right away to stop the bleeding as soon as possible.

Blood thinner drugs are also called anticoagulants or antiplatelets. Some people take blood thinners as a pill. Others take a shot. You may be on blood thinners because you have:

- An abnormal heart rhythm like atrial fibrillation
- Had a heart attack or stroke
- Had a heart defect since you were born
- Had heart valve surgery
- A blood clot somewhere in your body like your leg or lung
- A stent in your heart or brain

What care is needed at home?

- Ask your doctor what you need to do when you go home. Make sure you understand everything the doctor says. This way you will know what you need to do.
- Take extra care with all of your drugs.
 - Tell ALL your doctors, dentists, nurses, and pharmacists that you are taking a blood-thinning drug. Carry a card in your wallet or wear a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace. This will help others know to not order a drug that interacts or adds to the blood-thinning drug you are taking.
 - Talk with your doctor before you take drugs like celecoxib, Celebrex, naproxen, Aleve, Naprosyn, ibuprofen, Advil, or Motrin.
 - Make sure your medicine looks the same every time you pick it up at the pharmacy. Some drugs are different colors based on the strength. Talk to the pharmacist if the color of your drug changes.
 - Talk to your doctor before you take any new drugs, over the counter medicines, vitamins, or supplements. Drugs, vitamins, and supplements can all change how well your anticoagulant works.
- Take your blood thinner exactly as ordered.
 - Your doctor will order an exact amount of the blood thinner drug for you. You need to know how much you are supposed to take each day and take it at the same time each day.
 - You may want to make a calendar with the dose of the drug on it. Then you can mark off each dose as you take it.

- Use a pill box to help you organize your drugs.
- Do not skip doses or stop taking this drug without talking to your doctor.
- Do not double the dose if you miss a dose. Ask your doctor what to do if you miss a dose.
- Learn how to give yourself a shot if the doctor has ordered the blood thinner in the shot form. You may want your caregiver to learn how to give you a shot instead. Ask about home health nurses to help you with the shots.
- Protect yourself from bruising and bleeding.
 - Avoid activities or places where you could be bruised, cut, hurt, or fall.
 - Protect your hands from cuts. Take extra care when using knives or tools. Wear gloves when you work in the garden or around the house.
 - Use electric razors when shaving. Avoid using scissors and nail clippers.
 - Brush your teeth gently. Use a toothbrush with soft bristles. This will help to avoid bleeding from your gums.
 - Wear shoes or slippers on your feet at all times.
 - Blow your nose gently.
 - Use a stool softener so you will not have to strain with bowel movements. Do not use an enema or suppositories.
- If you start to bleed:
 - Apply pressure to the area until the bleeding stops. This will take several minutes longer than usual because of the blood-thinning drug. Ice may also help. You may need to call for emergency help or go to the nearest emergency room.
 - For a nose bleed, put pressure and ice on the bridge of your nose. If the bleeding does not stop in 5 to 10 minutes or the bleeding is very heavy, go to the nearest emergency room.

Taking Blood Thinners



What follow-up care is needed?

- If you take Coumadin or warfarin, you will likely need to have lab tests done to make sure your blood is clotting the right way. These tests are very important to help the doctor make sure you are taking the right dose of your blood thinner drug.
- You might need to have other lab tests to make sure your kidneys and liver are working properly.
- Your doctor may ask you to make visits to the office to check on your progress. Be sure to keep these visits.

Will physical activity be limited?

- You may have to limit your activity. Talk with your doctor about what activities are best for you. Ask if it is safe for you to exercise, play sports, or have sex.
- Avoid activities that can cause bruising and bleeding. Avoid climbing on ladders.
- Ask your doctor about driving.

What changes to diet are needed?

What you eat and how much alcohol you drink can affect the levels of some blood thinners. If you take the blood thinner Coumadin or warfarin:

- Keep the amount of vitamin K you eat in your diet consistent. It is ok to eat foods with vitamin K as long as you eat about the same each day.
- Know how much vitamin K you are eating each day. Watch your portion size.
- Do not all of a sudden change how much vitamin K you are eating.
- Avoid multivitamins, natural products, and dietary supplements that have added vitamin K.
- Talk with your doctor or a dietitian to learn more about foods that have Vitamin K in them.
- Drinking alcohol can affect how your blood clots and how your warfarin works. You may need more blood tests to check your warfarin levels if you drink alcohol. Talk with your doctor about how much alcohol you drink and how often you drink alcohol.

What problems could happen?

- Too much bleeding
- Blood clots may still form

When do I need to call the doctor?

- Tell your doctor about any falls or blows to the head, even if you feel fine. Go to the emergency room to be checked if you are not able to reach your doctor.
- If your vomit is bloody or looks like coffee grounds, go to the emergency room if you can't reach your doctor.
- Cuts or wounds with bleeding that cannot be controlled with pressure
- Bruising more easily than usual
- Gums won't stop bleeding with each brushing
- Pink or reddish-brown color in the urine
- Bowel movements that are red or black like tar or blood in the toilet
- Nose bleeds that won't stop with pressure put on the nose
- Confusion, feeling dizzy or faint, unusual headaches
- If you notice broken blood vessels in the white of the eye
- Coughing up blood
- For females, heavier than normal menstrual cycle

Teach Back: Helping You Understand

The Teach Back Method helps you understand the information we are giving you. After you talk with the staff, tell them in your own words what you learned. This helps to make sure the staff has described each thing clearly. It also helps to explain things that may have been confusing. Before going home, make sure you can do these:

- I can tell you about my condition.

- I can tell you how I will take blood thinners and what I will do to protect myself from bleeding.
- I can tell you what changes I need to make with my diet or activities.
- I can tell you what I will do if I fall, have bleeding that will not stop, or have too much bruising.

Where can I learn more?

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

<https://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/diagnosis-treatment/treatments/btpills/btpills.html>

American Heart Association

<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/arrhythmia/prevention--treatment-of-arrhythmia/a-patients-guide-to-taking-warfarin>

UpToDate

<https://www.uptodate.com/contents/warfarin-coumadin-beyond-the-basics>

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Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer:

This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from your health care provider. This is only a brief summary of general information. It does NOT include all information about conditions, illnesses, injuries, tests, procedures, treatments, therapies, discharge instructions or life-style choices that may apply to you. You must talk with your health care provider for complete information about your health and treatment options. This information should not be used to decide whether or not to accept your health care provider's advice, instructions or recommendations. Only your health care provider has the knowledge and training to provide advice that is right for you.

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