

## WARFARIN

### **What is Warfarin?**

Warfarin is a medication that thins your blood so that you do not clot too much. It is also called an anticoagulant. This pink/red tablet, and each tablet is 5mg. The dose is different for each person, and may be 1 tablet, half, one and a half or two tablets every day, or sometimes you will be asked to take a different dose on weekends or every second day.

### **Why do i need warfarin?**

Warfarin is used in people who have developed a harmful blood clot, including some people who have had a stroke, heart attack, a clot that has travelled to the lung (pulmonary embolism or PE), or a blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis or DVT). In lupus, this is often due to a blood problem called *antiphospholipid syndrome*. Warfarin is also prescribed for people who are at increased risk for developing harmful blood clots. This includes people with a mechanical heart valve, an irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation.

Warfarin does not dissolve clots, but it keeps them from increasing in size and moving to another part of the body. This allows the body's natural systems to break down a clot over time, and helps reduce the chance of clots developing in people with a higher risk of forming clots. Warfarin prevents and treats serious medical problems caused by blood clots.

### **INR monitoring**

The dose of warfarin is adjusted to keep the clotting time within a target range, based on a blood test called the INR (or International Normalized Ratio). Your INR needs to be checked about every four or six weeks, and more often when you start taking it. This can be done by your nearest day hospital, your GP, or at the Groote Schuur INR clinic.

**We would like your INR to be between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .**

The longer it takes the blood to clot, the higher INR. In a person who is not taking warfarin, the INR would be approximately 1.

If the INR is too low, (ie, under-anticoagulated), there is an increased risk of clotting. You will need to take a higher dose of warfarin.

If the INR is too high (ie, over-anticoagulated), there is an increased risk of bleeding. This includes serious, life-threatening bleeding such as bleeding into the brain or internal bleeding, which is uncommon, and minor bleeding such as easy bruising, gum bleeding, or nosebleeds. You may need to skip a few days of warfarin, and might need to take a lower dose.

### **Can I fall pregnant on warfarin?**

There is a small risk to the unborn baby if you use warfarin while pregnant, and this should be discussed with your doctor. Warfarin is safe for use while breastfeeding.

### Hints for taking warfarin

- **Always tell any healthcare provider that you consult (doctor, dentist, nurse), that you are taking warfarin.**
- **Safety while using warfarin:** There is a tendency to bleed more easily than usual while taking warfarin. Take simple measures to decrease risk of bleeding: Always use a seatbelt; Wear a helmet when riding a bicycle or motorcycle.
- Don't use non-prescription medicines that contain a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug ("NSAID") or other over-the-counter remedies
- Take warfarin at the same time each day
- avoid drinking excessive amounts of alcohol over a short period of time (eg, with a single meal) because this can affect the INR and increase the risk of injury and serious bleeding
- Some foods and supplements can affect warfarin's effectiveness. You can still enjoy these foods. Where possible, try and eat the more or less same amount of these types of food each day (broccoli, brussels sprouts, turnip greens, kale, spinach; cauliflower, legumes, asparagus, avocado, cabbage)
- Talk to your doctor or nursing siter if you are unsure.

**When to seek help** — If there are signs of bleeding, including the following, you should call your healthcare provider **immediately or go to your nearest hospital or clinic and tell them that you take warfarin..**

- Vomiting blood or other material that looks like coffee grounds
- Nosebleeds
- Dark red or brown urine or blood in the bowel movement
- A serious fall or head injury, or other serious injury even if there are no other symptoms

### Contact us:

- Talk to your rheumatologist or rheumatology nurse - phone during clinic times (021) 404 5394 (Monday or Friday) or (021) 404 5313 (Thursday)
- The GSH INR clinic **021 404 5342**