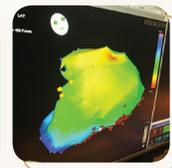


Life with Anticoagulants



Sometimes known as “blood thinners,” anticoagulants are medicines to help keep your blood from clotting and help keep it flowing easily.

The key to life with anticoagulants is consistency. From how to take your medicine to how to eat and drink while taking it, it’s important to keep things consistent.

And you must talk to your doctor whenever inconsistencies, or changes, occur while you’re taking an anticoagulant.

TAKING AN ANTICOAGULANT

Hitting the target

- Your doctor decides how much anticoagulant medicine you need by doing an INR (International Normalized Ratio) blood test. The test measures how fast your blood clots — too slow (a high INR), and you risk bleeding problems; too fast (a low INR), and you risk forming clots.
- Likewise, taking too much anticoagulant will increase bleeding and taking too little anticoagulant will increase clotting, so it’s essential your doctor hit your target range for dosage.
- Since your doctor must know your INR to hit that target, you must get your blood tested at the day and time you’re scheduled.

Taking your medicine

- Always take your anticoagulant medicine as directed.
- Take it at the same time every day – typically in the evening.
- You can take your anticoagulant with other medications or food.
- Never skip a dose or take a double dose.

Evaluating side effects

- Side effects while taking an anticoagulant are uncommon, but typically involve slight bleeding — like a little gum bleeding while you brush your teeth, or a little heavier menstrual bleeding.
- Significant bleeding — such as blood in your urine or bowel movements, coughing up or vomiting blood, or sudden bruising without cause — is reason to call your doctor or go to the hospital.
- Rarely, patients taking anticoagulants experience hair loss or skin rashes.

BEING SAFE WITH AN ANTICOAGULANT

Taking proper precautions

- Because an anticoagulant makes you bleed more easily, it’s vital you be extra-careful with objects and activities that can cause bleeding.
- For example, switch to using an electric razor, a soft toothbrush and waxed dental floss.

3000 NORTH IH 35, SUITE 720
AUSTIN, TX 78705
TOLL-FREE 877.887.7737
512.544.2342

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- Wear protective gear while doing potentially harmful activities — even if it's just gloves and shoes while you garden.
- Consider wearing a MedicAlert® bracelet to let healthcare workers know you're taking an anticoagulant, should you be badly hurt and can't communicate.

Calling after falling

- If you do hurt yourself and the bleeding doesn't stop within 10 minutes, then you must go to the hospital and get help immediately.
- Once you've been cared for at the hospital, call your doctor's office and let them know what happened.
- Realize you can be bleeding without seeing any blood at all. If you hit your head, bleeding can happen under your skull, or if you hit some other part of your body, bleeding can happen beneath the skin and look like a big, purple bruise.
- If you take a bad fall, regardless of whether you're bleeding, go to the hospital and get help immediately.

MIXING MEDICINES WITH AN ANTICOAGULANT

Taking other medicines

- Always tell you doctor about all medicines you're taking — whether they are prescription, over-the-counter, nutritional supplements or herbal products.
- Put together a list of everything you're taking, and talk with your doctor before beginning to take anything new.

Avoiding aspirin-based products

- Aspirin-based medicines further reduce your blood's ability to form clots – so never take aspirin-based products without talking with your doctor about it.
- Aspirin shows up in some unexpected over-the-counter medicines, such as Alka-Setzer® and Pepto Bismol®. Get a complete list from your doctor; they can also give you a list of over-the-counter medicines you can take instead.

EATING RIGHT WITH AN ANTICOAGULANT

Staying the same

- Continue to eat what you normally eat — make no major changes to your diet without talking with your doctor first.
- The same is true of alcohol — alcohol should be limited to a drink a day, but keeping consistent is key. So if you regularly have a glass of wine with dinner, continue to do so. But do not drink more than you usually do daily — for example, avoid “just one more” at special occasions or on holidays.
- If you can't eat for several days, no matter why, or if you have stomach problems, vomiting or diarrhea lasting longer than a day, call your doctor.

Living healthy with an anticoagulant

- Keep moving — Being active is still good for your health. But if the activities you enjoy tend to risk injury, then protect yourself, or try something new. If you want to raise your level of exercise, then be sure to talk with your doctor about it first.
 - Monitor illness — If you do get sick, especially with a fever, flu or infection, then call your doctor, as it can affect your INR and your dosage.
 - Tell everyone — It is critical that you tell all your doctors, including your dentist, that you're taking an anticoagulant. Share your list of all the medicines you're taking with all of your healthcare providers. And if another doctor prescribes new medication for you, then make sure you call your cardiac doctor and let us know so we can include it in your records.
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