Society for Vascular Nursing Patient Education: Warfarin (Coumadin®)

Coumadin® is a medicine that thins your blood in order to prevent clots from forming in your blood vessels. It is very important to keep the proper amount of Coumadin® in your bloodstream. If the level of Coumadin® drops, a blood clot could form in your blood vessels. If the level of Coumadin® is too high, bleeding may occur.

To maintain the correct amount of Coumadin® in your bloodstream:
- Take Coumadin® at the same time every day, or as told by your healthcare provider. Coumadin® is often taken in the afternoon or at bedtime. You may take it with or without food.
- If you forget to take your medicine and remember it on the same day, take the dose as soon as you remember.
- It is important that you DO NOT double your dose to make up for missed doses. Instead, take your normal daily dose. If you forget for more than 2 days, inform your doctor or nurse immediately.
- DO NOT stop taking your Coumadin® unless your nurse or doctor tells you to.
- Keep your appointments for your blood tests. The blood tests are important to help your healthcare provider adjust the amount of Coumadin® that you need to take.
- Call your healthcare provider or nurse if you cannot keep an appointment.
- You may eat the day of your blood test. You do not need to fast before these tests.
- Call your healthcare provider's office after your blood tests if they have not called you. Once the right amount of Coumadin® has been determined, you should have a blood test every 1 to 4 weeks. It is important to keep your appointments.
- Keep a record of the test results and your daily dose of Coumadin®.
- Keep eating as usual.
- DO NOT START OR STOP ANY MEDICINES without first talking about it with your healthcare provider, including prescription, over-the-counter medicines or vitamins.
- DO NOT CHANGE YOUR EATING HABITS without first talking to your doctor, nurse, or dietician.
- DO NOT EAT large amounts of green raw vegetables, including brussel sprouts, cauliflower, spinach, kale, broccoli, collards, parsley, cabbage, etc. Consult your healthcare provider’s office with any questions.
- DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL. Check with your doctor about having a small amount of alcohol (1-2 drinks) on occasion. Alcohol can increase your risk of bleeding.

As you are taking Coumadin® you may need to take some safety measures:
- Tell every doctor, dentist, or pharmacist that you see during your treatment that you are taking Coumadin®. Bring your Coumadin® log to every appointment.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist before starting any vitamins, diet supplements or over-the-counter medicines.
- Wear an ID bracelet/carry a card in your wallet that states that you are on Coumadin®.
- Avoid injury from some daily activities that can cause you to bleed:
  - BRUSHING TEETH-Use a soft toothbrush to prevent your gums from bleeding.
  - SHAVING-Use an electric razor instead of a razor blade to avoid cutting yourself.
  - CUTTING-Be careful when you handle any sharp tools such as kitchen knives.
  - DO NOT BLOW YOUR NOSE WITH TOO MUCH FORCE. It may cause a nosebleed that will be hard to stop.
  - EXERCISE REGULARLY-Talk to your doctor or nurse about what exercises you can do while on this medicine.

Tell your Healthcare Provider if:
- You are pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant. Coumadin® should not be taken during pregnancy.
- You have any of the following side effects of this medicine:
  - Severe headaches
  - Dizziness
  - Urine that is pink, red or brown in color
  - Weakness
  - Bleeding that does not stop
  - Vomiting red blood or material that looks like coffee grounds
  - Loose stools that are red or black in color
  - Frequent nose bleeds
  - Bruises, bleeding or swelling without any obvious reason
  - Severe pain
  - Unusual vaginal bleeding or long periods.

If you cannot reach your doctor or nurse and have any of the symptoms go to the emergency room!

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SVN: Advancing the care of persons living with vascular disease