



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Anticoagulants

Anticoagulants are medications that affect the way your blood clots, or coagulates. Normally, blood coagulates only at an injury site, in order to prevent further bleeding. But if certain conditions are present, your blood can clot improperly. When coagulation occurs inside blood vessels, the resulting blood clots can interfere with circulation and create serious problems, such as strokes and heart attacks. Anticoagulant drugs, therefore, prevent more clots from forming, thus reducing the risk of dangerous clot formation.

The clotting and anticlotting chemicals in your blood must be delicately balanced, and the correct dose of anticoagulant must, therefore, be carefully adjusted for you. To do this, your health care professional regularly orders a blood test called a Prothrombin Time, or Pro-Time, for short. The test results tell your health care professional how to adjust your medication.

A day after you take the Pro-Time test, you'll probably receive a phone call about how you should take your medication. It's important that you write this information down and follow it exactly. You'll also be told when to come in for your next Pro-Time test. These tests are given frequently when anticoagulant therapy is started; then less frequently after the proper dose has been established. If you don't hear from your health care professional the day after your test, call the office for instructions.

The most common anticoagulant is Coumadin. The other main anticoagulant, Heparin, is not usually given at home.

Here are seven pieces of advice related to Coumadin:

- 1.) Be sure to take exactly the prescribed dose, at the same time each day.
- 2.) If you miss a dose at your regular time, take it as soon as possible. If you miss a whole day, do not take a double dose the next day. Record the date of the missed dose and tell your health care professional during your next visit. Missing a day may alter your Pro-Time test results.
- 3.) Do not take aspirin, which can cause severe bleeding if taken with Coumadin. Use acetaminophen instead, and check all nonprescription drugs to make sure they're aspirin-free.
- 4.) Do not take any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, without first notifying your health care professional. For example, starting or stopping sleeping pills or starting certain vitamins can be dangerous.
- 5.) Be sure to inform all your health care professionals, including your dentist, that you're taking Coumadin so they won't prescribe medications that could interfere with its effects.

6.) Always wear or carry a notice that you're taking Coumadin, to alert medical personnel in the event of an accident. You can get a wallet card or an application for a Medic Alert emblem from the Health Education Department.

7.) Eat well-balanced meals and control your weight. But don't go on drastic diets or take diet pills without consulting your health care professional. Sudden changes in your diet can alter the effects of Coumadin. You should also consult with your health care professional before drinking alcohol.

When you're taking anticoagulants, you'll be seeing a health care professional regularly for Pro-Time tests and medication adjustments. You should also consult your health care professional promptly if you become pregnant, since Coumadin should not be taken during pregnancy. Another anticoagulant, such as Heparin, can be used during pregnancy.

And finally, it is possible for the anticoagulant to work "too well," resulting in unwanted bleeding. If you notice blood in your urine or bowel movements, have nose bleeds that are hard to stop, or see large, multiple bruises on your skin, call your health care professional promptly. This could mean that the Coumadin dose is too high. If not adjusted, more serious bleeding could result. After hours, call the emergency room at your nearest Kaiser Permanente facility.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION