

ANTICOAGULANTS

Anticoagulants are medications that help prevent unwanted blood clots. Blood clots can form for a variety of reasons and can cause serious health problems.

Anticoagulants such as Coumadin thin the blood to help prevent or reduce clot formation. It can also help keep existing clots from getting larger.

Your physician will determine the starting dose of Coumadin. Since your dosage will change based on lab tests, you should schedule your medication to be taken in the evening, about 6pm. This will allow us the time we need to notify you of lab results that we may not receive until late in the day.

When first being started on Coumadin, you will need to have your PT checked frequently, possibly once a week, to determine what dose of Coumadin is appropriate for you. Once your Coumadin has been established, you'll get your PT checked less frequently, possibly once a month.

PROTIMES

While you are taking Coumadin, it is very important that we monitor your blood to make sure it is not too thick, or too thin. If it is too thick, it can cause blood clots, heart attack or stroke. If too thin, you could have excessive bleeding.

The test we do is called a "protime" (PT). To check your blood, we may stick your finger, draw blood from a vein in your arm, or have you go to a reference lab to obtain a sample.

Factors that can influence how often you have your protime check, and how frequently your dose changes include your diet, the way your body metabolizes your medication, and interactions with other medications you may be taking. Certain illnesses may also affect PT results.

Because different labs use different testing equipment, your physician will ask that you **have your PT performed at the same place each time**. This will give us the most consistent readings and allow us to adjust your doses most accurately.

If you have your PT done with a finger stick in our office, you should get your results the same day. If you have your PT done through a vein in your arm, either here or at another facility, you may not get your results until the following day. PT's must be performed at the same facility each time to prevent inaccurate dosing.

Protimes at Wilmington Cardiology are done by appointment only, and are performed between the hours of 10am and 4pm. All appointments should be scheduled with our office. Walk-ins are discouraged and may cause you lengthy wait times.

If you have your PT drawn at another lab, hospital or office, you should schedule your test before 2pm. Labs drawn after 2pm may not be received by our office until the following day.

HOW TO TAKE YOUR MEDICATION

Each time you have your PT checked, your physician will decide whether or not to change the dose of your medicine. If your numbers are too low, your dose may be increased. If too high, your dose may be decreased, or even stopped temporarily.

Take your Coumadin at the same time each day. Taking it after 6pm allows us time to call you to change your dose if needed.

Keep a calendar by the phone. This will help you to be able to track and record any changes, as well as keeping track of your future appointments for PT's and office visits.

If you miss a dose of your medicine, take it as soon as you remember, but only if it is the same day. NEVER double your dose unless your physician advises you to.

Generic versions of Coumadin can vary in strength depending on the manufacturer and are not recommended.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- DO take your medication exactly as your physician has ordered.
- DO get your PT checked when you are supposed to.
- DO keep your diet and activities similar each day.
- Do notify each doctor, dentist or healthcare provider you see that you are taking a blood thinner.
- DO notify your doctor before starting any new medicines, either over the counter or prescription.
- DO watch for signs of bleeding, such as headache, dizziness, weakness, nosebleeds, cuts that do not stop bleeding, unusual bruising, bleeding gums, brown urine, or red or black stools.

- DO notify your doctor if you plan to travel out of town for an extended period. Arrangements for filling your prescriptions and obtaining lab test will need to be made in advance.
- DON'T stop taking your medication without consulting your doctor.
- DON'T take any new medications without consulting your doctor.
- DON'T take generic warfarin unless specifically directed by your physician.