Diet and coumarin anticoagulants: warfarin (Coumadin®), nicoumalone (Sintrom®)


English Translation in association with the group FA-CILITER. Revised by Thao Huynh MD. M.Sc. and Martine Montigny MD. M.Sc.
What is an anticoagulant?

An anticoagulant is a medication which prevents the formation of blood clots in your blood vessels.

When you take a coumarin-type anticoagulant, such as warfarin (Coumadin®) or nicoumalone (Sintrom®), it is important that you keep your anticoagulation levels within the target levels. If your level is too low, your risk of getting a clot increases. If your level is too high, your risk of bleeding increases.

Even if your levels are low or high, you may not have any symptom. Only regular blood tests can determine whether your anticoagulation levels are within an acceptable range for you.

The goal of this information leaflet is to help you optimize and stabilize the effects of your coumarin anticoagulant.

Please remember …

Many factors can impact your anticoagulation level. This is why it is important to notify your doctor, pharmacist or dietician if:

- You have trouble eating (for example because you feel sick or simply are not hungry).
- You have made major changes to your diet (for example following a diet to lose weight).
- You would like to start (or stop) taking a natural health product or a vitamin supplement.
- You would like to take an over-the-counter medication.
- Your health status has changed (for example you have a new disease).
Other recommendations (continued)

Natural health products

Some natural health products can interact with your anticoagulant medication or alter its effect. These health products should be avoided:

- Garlic capsules
- Dong Quai
- Coenzyme Q10
- Fenugreek
- Gingko biloba
- Ginger
- Ginseng
- Glucosamine-chondroitine
- Devil’s claw
- Borage oil
- Alfalfa
- Wild chamomile
- St.John’s wort
- Papain
- Danshen (red root sage)
- Spirulina

Omega 3 supplements can be taken, but any change in their intake should be reported.

Other natural health products that are not mentioned in this list can also alter your treatment. If you are taking or planning on taking health products, it will be important to notify your doctor and your pharmacist.

Vitamin K and coumarin anticoagulants

Vitamin K is essential for the blood clotting process. Your medication acts as an anticoagulant by blocking the action of vitamin K. The quantity of vitamin K consumed directly interferes with the anticoagulant you are taking. For this reason, it is important for you to consume a regular intake of vitamin K, to avoid excessive amounts at some times and none at all at other times.

Coumarin anticoagulants are sensitive to major changes in vitamin K intake, especially in people who do not receive sufficient quantities of this vitamin. You should not avoid foods that contain it, but ensure a constant intake of vitamin K.
For a good control of your anticoagulant effect, here are some rules to follow:

1. **Have a balanced diet** as per the Canadian food Guide.

![Diagram of balanced diet]

2. **Ensure a constant intake in vitamin K.**

3. **Do not avoid** foods containing vitamin K. People who do not get sufficient quantities of this vitamin have more difficulty maintaining their anticoagulation levels within targets ranges. In addition, these foods contain several other essential nutrients.

4. **Take your medication as per the instructions** you received from your doctor or pharmacist. These professionals always have to be notified if there is a change to your medication(s) (starting a new medication or stopping taking one).

**Other recommendations (continued)**

**Vitamin supplements**

Some vitamin supplements can interact with your anticoagulant medication. It is the case for the following vitamin supplements:

- **Vitamin K**: avoid these supplements
- **Vitamin E**: do not take more than 400 IU per day
- **Vitamin C**: do not take more than 500 mg per day

Taking a multivitamin supplement or a nutritional supplement (for example *Ensure, Boost*) should usually not cause any problem since these supplements contain all vitamins in small quantities. Nevertheless, it is important to take the same amount of multivitamin or nutritional supplement from day to day.

**Consult** your doctor or pharmacist **before taking any vitamin supplements.**
Other recommendations (continued)

**Alcohol**

Drinking too much alcohol can increase the effect of your anticoagulant medication and therefore increase your risk of bleeding.

A moderate intake of alcohol, whether 1 to 2 drinks per day should not influence the effect of your medication.

One alcoholic drink is defined as:

- 360 ml (12 ounces) of beer
- 150 ml (5 ounces) of wine
- 100 ml (3 ounces) of aperitif
- 45 ml (1 ½ ounces) of liquor

If you have questions or problems related to your alcohol intake, do not hesitate to contact the regional help line below:

➤ *Alcochoix + Laval* at (450) 622-5110 poste 4005.

To find a health center offering the program *Alcochoix* in your area, see the list found at this website:

➤ **www.alcochoixplus.gouv.qc.ca**

A balanced diet as per the Canadian Food Guide

The effect of your anticoagulant medication is influenced by dietary excesses and deficiencies, as well as by your nutritional status. Dietary habits as per the Canadian Food Guide promote a good nutritional status. Also, by avoiding abrupt changes in your eating habits, the effect of your anticoagulation medication will be easier to stabilize.

The Canadian Food Guide recommends a daily intake of the following:

- 7 portions of vegetables and fruits (4 vegetables and 3 fruits), including a dark green and an orange vegetable
- 6 portions of grain products, preferably whole grains
- 3 portions of milk and alternatives
- 2 to 3 portions of meats and alternatives
- 2 to 3 tablespoons of unsaturated fats: olive and canola oil and their derived products (margarine, mayonnaise, salad dressing, etc.) are preferable.

Please note that vitamin K can be found mostly in vegetables. Other foods are rather poor in vitamin K.
To ensure constant intakes of vitamin K

By using the following table as a guide, make sure to have a constant vitamin K intake from day to day and from one week to the other.

Vitamin K content of certain foods per ½ cup portion

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<tr>
<th>POOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Artichoke</td>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>Swiss chard</td>
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<td>Asparagus</td>
<td>Cabbage</td>
<td>Collards</td>
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<td>Eggplant</td>
<td>Brussels sprouts</td>
<td>Kale</td>
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<td>Beets</td>
<td>Watercress</td>
<td>Cooked spinach</td>
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<td>Carrot</td>
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<td>Celery</td>
<td>Chives</td>
<td>Mustard leaves</td>
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<td>Chives</td>
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Other recommendations

Green tea and cranberry juice

Excess quantities of green tea and cranberry juice can alter the effect of your medication. If you drink green tea or cranberry juice, it is essential to follow these recommendations:

Cranberry juice:
- Limit your intake to 1 to 2 cups per day

Green tea:
- Limit your intake to 1 to 2 cups per day
- Ensure a constant intake

Notify your doctor or pharmacist in case of a major change in your cranberry juice or green tea intake.