

# Blood-thinning medicines for atrial fibrillation

## Patient information - Cardiology Diagnostic and Interventional Services

Blood-thinning medicines are also called anticoagulants. They reduce your chance of having a stroke due to your atrial fibrillation. They do this by helping to prevent clots from forming in your heart.

All blood-thinning medicines increase your risk of bleeding and bruising because it will take longer for your blood to clot. It is possible to develop bleeding in your gut, or even your brain. You should contact your doctor immediately if you have bleeding problems.

The balance between the benefits and risks of taking blood-thinners needs to be considered for each person when deciding to use these medicines.

Some medicines, over-the-counter supplements, and herbal remedies should be avoided when you are on blood thinners.

Discuss with your doctor or pharmacist before starting new treatments while you are taking blood-thinners.

Two types of blood-thinners are used in atrial fibrillation. These are Warfarin, and Novel Oral Anticoagulants such as Dabigatran, Rivaroxaban, and Apixaban.

### **Warfarin**

Warfarin has been the most commonly used blood-thinner for a long time. You take it once a day, at the same time each day. You should take it with a glass of water.

If you are taking warfarin you will need regular blood tests (called an INR) to check your dose of Warfarin is still correct. If your dose is too high, you may have bleeding problems, but if it is too low, it may not prevent a stroke.

There is an antidote or reversal medicine for warfarin if severe bleeding problems happen.

Certain types of food can either increase or decrease the effect of Warfarin in the body. Foods high in Vitamin K, such as broccoli, spinach and parsley, can reduce the effect of Warfarin. Some dietary supplements may increase the effects of Warfarin. Try and maintain your normal diet without making big changes.

### **Novel Oral Anticoagulants such as Dabigatran, Rivaroxaban, and Apixaban**

These medicines are a newer alternative to Warfarin. They are as good as Warfarin in preventing strokes.

You do not need regular blood tests to check the dose of these medicines and they are less affected by other medicines and foods.

Like Warfarin, they can cause bleeding problems. Dabigatran has a reversal medicine, but Rivaroxaban and Apixaban currently do not.