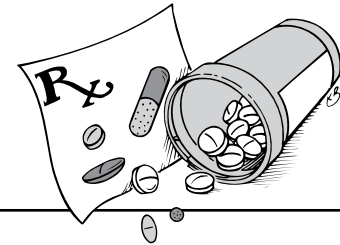


# Let's Talk About Anticoagulants and Antiplatelet Agents

Anticoagulants (AN-ti-ko-AG-u-lants) and antiplatelet (AN-ti-PLAYT-lit) agents are medicines that interfere with the blood's ability to clot in an artery, vein or the heart. Doctors use them to help patients prevent strokes caused by a blood clot.



## What should I know about anticoagulants?

Anticoagulants (or “blood thinners”) are medicines that delay the clotting of blood. Two examples are heparin and warfarin (brand name COUMADIN). Anticoagulants make it harder for clots to form or keep existing clots from enlarging in your heart, veins or arteries. Treatment should be supervised, and it should last only as long as necessary.

- Follow your doctor’s (or other healthcare provider’s) instructions.
- Have regular blood tests so your doctor can tell how the medicine is working.
- Never take aspirin with anticoagulants unless your doctor tells you to.

- You must tell other healthcare providers that you’re taking anticoagulants.
- Always check with your doctor before taking other medications or food supplements, such as aspirin, vitamins, cold medicine, pain medicine, sleeping pills or antibiotics. These can alter the effectiveness and safety of anticoagulants by strengthening or weakening them.
  - Let your doctor know if you have been started on any new medications that might interfere with the action of warfarin.
- Discuss your diet with a healthcare professional.
- Tell your family how you take anticoagulant medicine and carry your emergency medical ID card with you.

## Could anticoagulants cause problems?

Yes. Tell your doctor if:

- Your urine turns pink or red.
- Your stools turn red, dark brown or black.
- You bleed more than normal when you have your period.
- Your gums bleed.
- You have a very bad headache or stomach pain that doesn’t go away.
- You get sick or feel weak, faint or dizzy.
- You think you’re pregnant.
- You often find bruises or blood blisters.
- You have an accident of any kind.

## What should I know about antiplatelet agents?

Antiplatelet medicines keep blood clots from forming by preventing blood platelets from sticking together. They’re used as part of a

treatment for patients with atherosclerosis or with increased clotting tendencies. Atherosclerosis is the process by which

## What should I know about antiplatelet agents? (continued)

deposits of cholesterol form along inner walls of blood vessels, creating the conditions for blood clots to form.

- Antiplatelets are generally prescribed preventively, when atherosclerosis is evident but there is not yet a large obstruction in the artery.

- Antiplatelet drugs include aspirin, ticlopidine, clopidogrel and dipyridamole.
- Aspirin is an important therapeutic agent for stroke prevention. It's a medicine that can save your life if you have heart problems, or if you have had a stroke or TIA. **You must use aspirin just as your doctor tells you, and not in your own way.**

## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American

Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653), and:

- ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers trained to answer your questions and offer support.
- ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area.
- ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

## Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

What kind of aspirin or other antiplatelet agent should I take?

What should I do if I forget to take it?

What is the right dose for me?



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