

# Anticoagulants - Which one?

An information guide



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Anticoagulants are used to reduce the body's ability to form blood clots or to prevent existing clots getting bigger.

Certain illnesses, medical procedures or existing physical problems require people to take anticoagulants to either prevent clots or treat existing ones. These include:

- An irregular heartbeat
- Surgical procedures
- Reduced mobility
- Recent stroke
- Being pregnant or recently given birth
- Deep Vein Thrombosis
- Pulmonary Embolism
- Heart Attack

Although all anticoagulants work on the complex clotting process within the body, different types of anticoagulants work in different ways and have different requirements in their management.

Anticoagulants are split into different groups; those which can be taken by mouth as tablets and those which require to be injected into the skin.

The decision on which anticoagulant to use can be dependent on why it is required and any medication already being taken. For example a patient who is pregnant will require injections instead of tablets as these have been shown to be the safest in these circumstances.

Any decision on which type to take should be made after a discussion between the patient/carer and a medical professional.

## **Common types of anticoagulants which are injected are:**

- Enoxaparin (also known as Clexane)
- Dalteparin (also known as Fragmin)
- Fondaparinux (also known as Arixtra)

All these are taken as an injection under the skin in the tummy once or twice a day. Patients can inject these themselves after receiving guidance by trained staff or they can be injected by a family member or carers. A common side effect of these injections is bruising around the site of the injection.

A “sharps bin” will be provided to put used syringes into after the medication has been administered. When the sharps bin is full it needs to be returned to the department providing your injections if your chemist does not accept them. Disposal of sharps bins varies from area to area.

## **Common types of anticoagulants taken as tablets once or twice a day are:**

- Warfarin
- Acenocoumarol (also known as Sinthorome)
- Apixaban (also known as Eliquis)
- Rivaroxaban (also known as Xarelto)
- Edoxaban (also known as Lixiana)
- Dabigatran (also known as Pradaxa)

## **Warfarin/Acenocoumarol**

The dose to be taken can vary on a daily basis. The dose will be worked out by your health care professional and is based on the result of blood tests which are undertaken on a regular basis. Warfarin can be affected by certain foods, alcohol and medication. The tablets are best taken whole but can be provided in a liquid form.

## **Apixaban**

Apixaban is taken twice a day, the dose is usually fixed and determined by the reason it is being taken. It can be taken with or without food and can be crushed for patients who are unable to swallow whole tablets. It does not require frequent blood testing and can be put into a dosette box or blister-pack.

## **Rivaroxaban**

Rivaroxaban is taken once or twice a day and the dose is fixed but determined by the reason it is being taken. Rivaroxaban is required to be taken with food but does not require frequent blood testing and can be crushed for patients who are unable to swallow whole tablets. Rivaroxaban can also be put into a dosette box or blister-pack.

## **Edoxaban**

Edoxaban is taken once a day and the dose to be taken is dependent on body weight. It can be taken with or without food and can be crushed. This can also be put into a dosette box or blister-pack.

## **Dabigatran**

Dabigatran is taken once or twice a day and the dose generally fixed and determined by the reason it is being taken. The capsule should be swallowed whole but can be taken with or without food. Dabigatran cannot be removed from its original package until it is taken and is therefore not suitable for a conventional dosette box or blister-pack.

### **Common side effects of all anticoagulants**

- Bruising
- Prolonged bleeding of cuts or injuries

### **Side Effects which require immediate medical review**

- Excessive bleeding
- Vomiting or coughing or passing blood (stools/urine)
- Vomiting or coughing or passing dark matter (stools/urine)
- Head, eye or joint injury
- Excessive bruising
- Allergic reaction
- Sudden severe headache
- Any other concerns or changes to health

You can help provide more information on the safety of these medications by reporting any side effects to [www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard).

**To prevent unwanted blood clots forming always try to take your prescribed anticoagulant as directed and at the same time each day.**

Anti-platelet medication such as Aspirin or Clopidogrel can increase your risk of bleeding.

Always inform your dentist you are taking an anticoagulant.

Always ensure your health care provider is aware you are taking an anticoagulant before starting any new medication (including herbal remedies).

If you are taking an anticoagulant, you will be provided with a Patient Alert Card either in your box of tablets or (if prescribed warfarin or acenocoumarol) from your anticoagulant clinic. This should be kept with you at all times and shown to any healthcare professional that treats you.

## **Further Information:**

### **Trust Leaflets**

Warfarin Therapy and AF Anticoagulant Service – PI\_DS\_080

What is Clexane and what is it used for? – PI (ICS) 1020

What is Fragmin and what is it used for? – PI (ICS) 1024

Warfarin Therapy and Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – PI\_DS\_079

Patient information leaflet provided with prescribed medication

### **National Sites**

Anticoagulant medicines - NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anticoagulants/>

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**For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service**

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