

Patient information

Anticoagulation Service

Introduction

This is a brief guide to some important facts about warfarin and how our service works. Please read this leaflet with care and keep it for future reference.

Information pack

The accompanying information pack includes a booklet called *Oral Anticoagulant Therapy: Important Information for Patients*. This booklet provides general information about taking warfarin, side effects and things which can affect your anticoagulation control. Please read this booklet carefully and keep it for future reference. The information pack also includes an alert card; please carry this card with you at all times in case of emergency and to show to healthcare professionals such as doctors, dentists and pharmacists when you see them.

Warfarin counselling

We will contact you to arrange a counselling session with an Anticoagulation Nurse Specialist. The purpose of the counselling session is to ensure that you have all the information that you need to understand what you can do to help keep your anticoagulation at a safe and effective level. We will also discuss possible side effects with you and what to do in an emergency. We will also tell you how our service works and how to contact us when you need to.

Blood tests

We need to monitor your anticoagulation therapy to ensure that it stays at the right level for you. We monitor your anticoagulation using a blood test called the INR (International Normalised Ratio). A blood sample may be taken from a vein in the arm (a venous sample) or by finger-prick. A venous sample can be taken in most

GP practices (your GP practice can confirm whether they offer this service) and at other locations such as the West Suffolk Hospital, Newmarket Hospital and Sudbury Community Health Centre (see *How to Book a Blood Test* below for further information). We also provide finger-prick test Clinics at the West Suffolk Hospital and Newmarket Hospital (please contact us for further information if interested in attending one of our clinics).

Your dosage advice letter

We will send you a letter with your new warfarin dosage advice every time you have an INR check. We send all dosage advice letters by first class post so you should receive your new dosage advice letter very promptly after an INR check; please contact us as soon as possible if you do not receive your letter within three working days of your INR check. Your dosage advice is shown in the *New Anticoagulant Dosage Advice* section of your letter. Please read this advice very carefully and ensure that you follow it exactly.

The request form for your next blood test is the *Your INR Request Form* section of your dosage advice letter. Please give this section to the person taking your blood sample. Please also ensure that you answer the questions on your request form each time you have a blood test (see the *Keeping Us Informed* and *An Important Note about Antibiotics* sections of your dosage advice letter).

Telephoning urgent advice

We may need to telephone you with your new dosage advice when you have an INR check; we will do so when you have your first INR check after starting warfarin and whenever you need to make an immediate dose change. We will also telephone you if there is any information written on your request form that we need to discuss with you. Please ensure that you can be contacted by telephone on the day of your blood test since we may need to speak with you urgently. Also, please advise us of any change of telephone number (or address) as soon as possible.

Medication changes and illness

Starting or stopping another medicine while taking warfarin can affect your INR. In general you should have an INR check one week after any medication change but antibiotics can cause an especially marked and rapid change in INR so you should always have an INR check 3 or 4 days after starting an antibiotic.

Illness can also affect your INR, particularly if associated with diarrhoea and vomiting or a marked loss of appetite. Accordingly, if you are unwell for more than a few days you should have an INR check.

You do not need to contact us to inform us that you are having an INR check because of a medication change or illness but please ensure that you write the name of the medicine or the nature of your illness and the date started on the back of your INR request form.

Bleeding and head injury

Bleeding is the main side effect associated with warfarin. You should seek medical attention if you:

- Pass blood in your urine or faeces
- Have a nose bleed lasting more than 10 minutes
- Have bleeding from the gums
- Cough or vomit blood
- Have unusual headaches
- Have severe bruising
- If female, have heavy bleeding during your period or other vaginal bleeding

You should seek **urgent** medical attention if you:

- Have a fall or accident
- Have a significant blow to your head
- Are unable to stop any bleeding

How to contact us

Telephone: 01284 713085 (This line is open 09.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays).

e-mail: wsh-tr.anticoagulation@nhs.net

Post: Anticoagulation Service, West Suffolk Hospital, Hardwick Lane, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. IP33 2QZ.

How to book a blood test

Appointments at West Suffolk Hospital and Sudbury Community Health Centre:

Telephone: 03331 032220 (This line is open 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays)

Online: www.wsh.nhs.uk/Bloodtests

Community Nurses for home visits (house-bound patients):

Telephone: 0333 123 2425 (This line is open 24/7)

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:
<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>