



## **Bridging Therapy**

Things to consider if you're taking warfarin (Coumadin®) and having a medical procedure.

**A patient's guide**

Thrombosis Service



## **Introduction**

You are taking warfarin (Coumadin®), which is a blood thinner used to prevent blood clotting and strokes. It is important to take your warfarin on a regular schedule and exactly as your health care provider tells you to.

If you are planning to have a surgery or other medical procedure, there are some important things you must do. Many common medical procedures and surgeries can't be done while you are taking warfarin because this medicine will make you more likely to bleed, but stopping warfarin for a procedure may increase your risk of forming a harmful blood clot.

It is important for you, your health care provider, and your anticoagulation provider to discuss your situation and whether you should stop taking warfarin before and after your procedure.

## **What do I need to do if I'm having a medical procedure or surgery while taking warfarin?**

If you are on warfarin and need to have a medical procedure or surgery, there are four things you must do:

1. Make sure the health care provider performing the procedure knows that you are taking warfarin. Tell them as soon as possible, BEFORE the procedure.
2. Talk to the health care provider who manages your warfarin as soon as you know you are having a procedure. They will need as much time as possible to help you plan changes in your anticoagulant (blood-thinning) medication before and after your procedure. You should contact them at least seven days before a procedure, if possible.
3. Tell your primary health care provider you are having a procedure and about any changes made to your blood-thinning medication.
4. Find out if you need bridging therapy.

## **What is considered a medical procedure?**

Examples of medical procedures include:

- Dental work
- Medical testing (including colonoscopy, endoscopy, biopsy)
- Surgery (including eye surgery)

You may not need to stop taking warfarin for all of these procedures, but you should always check with the provider performing the procedure, and your warfarin provider before a procedure to see if a change in your warfarin is needed.

### **What is bridging therapy?**

Bridging therapy, also known as bridging anticoagulation, is when warfarin is temporarily stopped and blood is thinned with an injectable anticoagulant medicine (a shot), before and/or after a procedure.

For some procedures or surgeries, you may be asked to temporarily stop warfarin because of an increased risk of bleeding.

Using short-acting blood thinners around the time of a procedure (bridging) may decrease the risk of blood clots forming, but it can also increase bleeding risk. Depending on the risk of blood clots and the risk of bleeding, bridging is not right for everyone.

### **Is bridging therapy right for me?**

This is something you need to discuss with:

1. Your primary health care provider
2. The provider performing the procedure
3. The provider who manages your warfarin

In some circumstances, bridging may decrease your risk of blood clots or stroke. In other cases, bridging may increase the risk of bleeding before and/or after a procedure.

Deciding if bridging therapy is the right choice for you depends on your specific situation. The following things need to be considered when making this decision:

1. The type of procedure you are having
2. The risk of bleeding associated with the procedure
3. Your individual risk of clotting
4. If you have a history of problems with clotting or bleeding
5. Your individual concerns about these risks

These things should be discussed with your primary health care provider and the person who manages your warfarin. Together you can decide whether or not you should use bridging anticoagulation.

You can also schedule an appointment with one of our thrombosis specialists who can help create a plan that is right for you.

### **How does bridging work?**

1. Warfarin is usually stopped five days before a procedure. This is done because warfarin lasts a long time in the body and can increase the chance of bleeding.
2. After you stop taking warfarin, you may be given a different and shorter-acting medicine to protect you against blood clots. This is called bridging. These short-acting blood thinners (also called anticoagulants) come in the form of a shot and are injected once or twice each day (by you, your significant other, or a caregiver). Because the shots are short acting, the medicine in the shots should be out of your system before your procedure.
3. After the procedure, you will take warfarin again when instructed. It will take about five days for warfarin to protect you once you restart this medicine. Because of this, you may be asked to continue taking anticoagulant shots for a few days. The medicine in the shots works quickly and can help prevent blood clots from forming until you have been taking warfarin long enough for it to protect you.

To help you plan your bridging, you can schedule an appointment with one of our Thrombosis (blood clot) specialists who can help make a plan that is right for you.

To make an appointment call: **(801) 213-2271** or **(801) 581-7818**.  
Ask for an appointment in the Bridging Clinic.

Thrombosis Service  
(24-hour pager):  
**1-800-783-3735**

Thrombosis Center:  
**(801) 585-3713**

Redwood  
Health Center  
Anticoagulation Clinic:  
**(801) 213-9150**

Thrombosis  
Research Group  
(24-hour pager):  
**(801) 339-5005**

[www.healthcare.utah.edu/thrombosis](http://www.healthcare.utah.edu/thrombosis)

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