

Warfarin: What Adolescents and Young Adults Need to Know

Drugs, alcohol, body piercings, tattoos and birth control have serious health implications when you are taking warfarin.

What are the risks?

Your personal and medical history should impact your decisions about drugs, alcohol, tattoos and birth control. These decisions have health implications and are especially relevant to adolescents and young adults who are taking warfarin because it can affect your INR or bleeding risk. INR (international normalized ratio) is a measure of the time it takes your blood to clot. Having an INR that is too high can put you at risk for bleeding, while an INR that is too low puts you at risk for clotting.

You can make the safest decisions by staying informed of the risks. You can have a confidential conversation with your healthcare team at any time without your parents. Although your healthcare team always encourages you to involve your parents, these conversations can occur in private and the content of the discussion will remain between you and your healthcare provider.

How does alcohol affect INR?

Occasional, irregular or binge drinking tends to raise the INR. This increases your risk of bleeding. Daily, regular drinking will decrease your INR. This increases your risk of clotting, because daily drinking causes your liver to metabolize (break down) warfarin quicker.

Also, alcohol causes changes in the stomach and intestines. These changes increase the risk of bleeding problems within the digestive system, like ulcers. Regular daily drinking in **small amounts** (no more than 1 drink) has little effect on the INR but you should talk with your doctor if you drink alcohol regularly.

How does tobacco use affect INR?

Smoking cigarettes or using other tobacco products increases your risk of developing a blood clot. Smoking tobacco causes your liver to break down warfarin quicker. This will decrease your INR. Smokeless tobacco is high in Vitamin K and will decrease the INR. Changes in the amount of tobacco used will affect the INR and increase the risk of bleeding or clotting.

How does marijuana use affect INR?

The effects of marijuana on the INR have not been well studied. The limited studies indicate marijuana will increase your INR and increase your chance of serious bleeding problems. Be truthful and honest with your care team if you use marijuana.

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To Learn More

- Anticoagulation Service 206-987-6262
1-888-987-2000
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
 - seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



What about other drugs, like inhalants, cocaine and methamphetamine?

Drugs like inhalants, cocaine and methamphetamine are not recommended at any time because they are against the law and very dangerous to your health and well-being. The effects of these drugs on warfarin and the INR are not well studied and your health could be seriously threatened. However, we understand that you might have questions. Your care team would much rather have an open conversation about this topic than have your questions go unanswered.

Can I have body piercings or tattoos?

Piercings and tattoos increase your risk of bleeding and an infection at the time of the procedure. Please talk to your doctor about your specific risks in case you need antibiotics or adjustments to your warfarin dosage.

What do young women need to know?

Menstrual cycles can be heavier when taking warfarin. Let your provider know if this is a discomfort or you are worried.

Using certain hormone-based birth control can increase your risk of having a blood clot. Please check with your doctor about birth control that is right for you. Warfarin can harm a fetus, especially in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Warfarin should not be taken during pregnancy without consulting with a doctor. It is important for girls who are sexually active & taking warfarin to prevent pregnancy. Discuss different options with your team.

This does not mean you can never plan a pregnancy. Planning a family must be discussed with your doctor for special arrangements to be made to your anticoagulant care.



Summary

Drugs, alcohol, body piercings, tattoos and birth control have serious health implications when you are taking warfarin. Know the risks and stay informed by talking openly with your care team. Check with your healthcare provider first before taking any type of medication, vitamin, supplement, or over-the-counter substance.

Having health issues is a really good excuse for not wanting to do things that you would otherwise be pressured to do by peers. My experience has been that nobody questions you when you use it as an excuse, and the peer pressure to do whatever quickly stops.

-Katie, age 18