

**Anticoagulation: Self-Care While Taking a Blood Thinner**

Blood thinning medications (anticoagulants) decrease the ability of blood to form clot (thrombus). Anticoagulants are prescribed for a number of medical conditions. Two examples include: treating patients with known blood clots and treating patients with an increased risk of developing blood clots. Blood thinners are commonly prescribed at the time of surgeries or procedures that are known to increase a patient's risk of developing a blood clot. There are a variety of anticoagulants available which come in intravenous (IV), subcutaneous (SQ), and pill (oral) formulations. Oral anticoagulants that don't require routine blood test monitoring are a convenient and effective option for the treatment and prevention of blood clots. Your provider will discuss and recommend an anticoagulant that is most appropriate for your individual situation.

*The following are home measures to care for yourself while taking an anticoagulant:*

1. Take your medications exactly as they are prescribed. Call your prescribing provider if you believe you are having a problem with your medication.
2. The following are general guidelines for patients taking a blood thinner:
  - a. Avoid hazardous or risky activities that could lead to injury such as contact sports or high-speed sports/activities. A few examples include biking, skiing, four-wheeling or snowmobiling. Blood thinners can cause serious and even life-threatening bleeding. If you are unsure if an activity is safe, avoid it unless otherwise instructed by your provider.
  - b. Notify your medical or dental providers that you are taking a blood thinner before undergoing any procedure or surgery. You should NOT have a spinal tap, puncture, injection or any other procedure involving the spine while taking an anticoagulant.
  - c. Avoid Aspirin and NSAIDs (eg Ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naproxen) while taking an anticoagulant unless directed otherwise by your provider. Adding these medications can increase your risk of bleeding. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be used as an alternative in most cases. Check with your primary care provider if you are unsure if Acetaminophen is safe for you.

Follow any additional recommendations your provider has made. The following are general recommendations for treating and preventing blood clots:

1. Your provider may prescribe graduated compression garment(s) to be worn during waking hours. As a general rule, these should be professionally fitted garments to ensure the proper strength, fit and style (eg knee-high vs thigh-high).
2. When you are not active, elevate your leg(s) above heart level as much as possible. A pillow under your leg(s) can be used to increase elevation if needed.
3. Walk frequently throughout the day. Avoid sitting without elevating your leg(s) or standing for long periods as much as possible. While sitting or standing, pump your foot up and down by alternating standing on your heel and standing on your toes. Walking and foot pumps activate the calf muscle to move blood in your veins.

**When should I call for help?**

**Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example:**

- You are dizzy, lightheaded or feel like you may faint.
- You faint/pass out (lose consciousness).
- You have difficulty breathing or feel like you cannot catch your breath.
- You have sudden chest pain, shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have problems with your vision or balance.
- You have an accident or injury that results in significant pain, swelling, or bleeding.
- You have an injury to your head or spine.

