Patient Teaching Guide: Coumadin Therapy
by Bugaloo, RN @ allnurses.com

This helpful guide on Coumadin (anticouagulant) is for nurses to use to inform patients. It details Coumadin's purpose, effects, and risks for patients who are otherwise uninformed.

This is an informational guide that I created for patients who are presently on Coumadin or expected to be on Coumadin upon discharge. It is in article form because it was a freelance article that I wrote. As we all know, it is up to nurses to do patient teaching, not the doctors! It is written in simple terminology that all patients can understand. When I was a home health nurse, it seemed that I was always doing research on diseases and conditions so that I could make up my own patient teaching guides. Not all hospitals have teaching resources on hand for nurses to use. Feel free to use this for teaching purposes if you wish.

Pulmonary Emboli (PE)
A pulmonary emboli is a blood clot in the lung. When you are hospitalized with a pulmonary emboli, anticoagulants will be administered in either injection form (Heparin or Lovenox) or as an IV drip (Heparin drip). After the blood clot has resolved and you are discharged from the hospital, you will probably be given a prescription for Coumadin to take at home.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)
A deep vein thrombosis is a blood clot deep in the vein. These usually develop in the legs. If the clot is serious enough to require hospitalization, you would be treated with either Heparin or Lovenox injections or a Heparin drip. Again, Coumadin is usually prescribed after hospitalization to prevent another blood clot from forming.

Atrial Fibrillation (A-Fib)
Atrial fibrillation is an irregular heart rhythm. For some, this is a chronic condition, which means that their heartbeats irregularly all the time. Patients with atrial fibrillation usually take Coumadin for the rest of their lives to prevent blood clots. With atrial fibrillation, blood clots can occur because the heart is pumping blood out at irregular intervals, so the volume of blood in the circulatory system is not consistent.

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As with most medications, Coumadin should be taken every day at the same time. Ask your doctor what time he wants you to take it. Usually, it is in the evening hours. If you miss a dose, you will need to contact your doctor so he can advise you what to do.

When you are taking Coumadin, there are some important things to remember. You should avoid an excessive diet of foods that are high in Vitamin K, such as green leafy vegetables, broccoli, green onions, asparagus and olive oil. Coumadin and Vitamin K work against each other. Vitamin K actually helps thicken the blood. It is given in injection form when someone's blood is dangerously thin. You should also avoid dangerous or hazardous activities which could result in bleeding or fractures. You should use a soft bristle toothbrush when brushing your teeth. Carry a card with you at all times that states that you are on Coumadin. Be aware of any signs of abnormal bleeding and report them to your doctor immediately. Let all of your physicians know that you are on Coumadin.

Coumadin, when taken as prescribed, works very well. By knowing a little bit more about this medication and following these tips, you become an active participant in your medical care.

Some information in this article provided by Mosby's Nursing Drug Reference, 2007

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After Hip and Leg Surgery

Surgery of the hips and legs requires some bedrest after surgery. This period of immobility can cause blood clots to form because your range of motion is compromised. Although precautions are taken to prevent blood clots after surgery, Heparin or Lovenox injections are usually used as well. Physical therapy is usually started in the hospital and then continued at home. When you are discharged home, you will usually be on Coumadin short term.

What are the risks of taking Coumadin? The main risk is that your blood may become too thin. This is why your doctor will want you to have your blood drawn regularly to check the PT/INR. The PT/INR results will tell your doctor how long it takes for your blood to clot and adjust your Coumadin dosage accordingly. It is very important to follow your doctor's orders concerning the blood work and dosage changes. Signs and symptoms of abnormally thinned blood are bleeding from the gums, excessive bruising, black, tarry stools (very dark or black bowel movements the consistency of tar) and blood in your urine.

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