



What are Direct-Acting Oral Anticoagulants (DOACs)?

You may know about anticoagulants as “blood thinners” used to treat certain blood vessel, heart and lung conditions, including atrial fibrillation (AFib), peripheral artery disease and venous thromboembolism. Anticoagulants keep blood clots from forming in an artery, a vein or the heart, and may prevent existing clots from getting larger. In particular, they are prescribed for AFib patients because their irregular heartbeats can cause blood to collect in the heart and form a clot that can travel to the brain, cutting off the oxygen and blood supply, causing a stroke. About one in seven people who have a stroke has AFib.



The more conventional anticoagulants are warfarin (Coumadin) and heparin. DOACs are a newer class of medications that may be more convenient to take if you are a suitable candidate for them.

What are the advantages of taking a DOAC versus other anticoagulants?

Traditional anticoagulants such as warfarin require monthly blood tests, dietary considerations and careful attention to the possibility of uncontrolled bleeding. DOACs are highly effective and don't require regular blood testing or special diets like warfarin. They have also been found to reduce the risk of brain bleed when taken for stroke prevention.

DOACs begin to work, and clear the system when needed, quicker than warfarin. They are also considered to have fewer drug interactions than warfarin.

What are the names of medications I may be prescribed?

Some DOAC medications include:

- Apixaban (Eliquis)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)
- Betrixaban (Bevyxxa)
- Edoxaban (Savaysa)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa)

What should I know about taking DOACs?

Excessive bleeding is a risk for anyone on anticoagulants. The effects of warfarin usually can be reversed with vitamin K. Three DOACs, dabigatran, apixaban and rivaroxaban, have specific reversal agents to stop bleeding.

You should always:

- Keep an anticoagulant alert card with you. Carry it in your purse or wallet so it can be found quickly and easily in case of an emergency. You can cut out, complete and use the one provided on this sheet.
- Tell any family members responsible for your care and all health care team members and dentists that you are taking an anticoagulant.
- Follow your medication regimen and don't stop taking your DOACs without talking with your health care professional. Doing so could actually increase your risk of stroke.
- Work with your health care team to plan when to stop taking your DOACs if you are having surgery or a test such as a colonoscopy.

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Could this medication cause problems?

If you follow your health care team’s advice, there probably won’t be problems. But you must contact them right away if:

- Your urine turns red or dark brown. This could be a sign of urinary tract bleeding.
- Your stools turn red, dark brown or black. This could be a sign of intestinal bleeding.
- You bleed more than normal when you have your period.
- Your gums bleed.
- You have a very bad headache or stomach pain that doesn’t go away.
- You get sick or feel weak, faint or dizzy.
- You think you’re pregnant.
- You often find bruises or blood blisters.
- You have an accident of any kind.

Anticoagulant Alert Card

Name: _____

Phone: _____ DOB: ____ / ____ / ____

I am on anticoagulant therapy.

I take _____ of _____
(dose) (name of medicine) (when I take it)

In case of injury or bleeding, contact the health care professional below.

Health care Professional: _____ Phone: _____

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Am I a candidate for DOACs?

Should I wear a medical alert bracelet that says I'm on a DOAC?



We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.



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