



Herbal Products

What patients who take warfarin (Coumadin) need to know

As more patients take an active role in their health care, they are turning toward alternative or natural remedies to treat and prevent illnesses. This handout explains what patients who take warfarin (Coumadin) need to know before they take herbal products.

Herbal products are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) like prescription and over-the-counter medicines are. Herbal products can be sold without adequate safety testing and without evidence that they produce the desired results.

While herbal products can provide benefits, there are many that do not work well with warfarin. Some herbs may put you at higher risk for bleeding complications, and some may make you more prone to developing clots.

If you are thinking about using any herbal product or dietary supplement, your Anticoagulation Clinic pharmacist can help you make an informed decision.

Quality

In most cases, herbal products are produced without standards for quality control. This can compromise their quality and purity. Herbal products may contain varying amounts of the active ingredient, unlisted ingredients, or potential contaminants. This can result in:

- Instability of the product.
- Inconsistent effects from different products that are labeled similarly.
- Toxicity (too much of the product in your body at one time and/or unwanted side effects).

Signs of Bleeding Complications

- **Unusual bleeding from gums.**
- **Prolonged nosebleeds.**
- **Red or dark urine.**
- **Bruises that do not go away.**
- **Coughing up, throwing up, or spitting up blood.**

Warning Signs of Blood Clots

- **Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.**
- **Sudden confusion.**
- **Trouble speaking or understanding.**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.**

Effectiveness

Before any prescription drug can be placed on the market, the FDA requires that the product be tested for effectiveness. Because herbal products are not regulated, there is still very little scientific evidence that proves their effectiveness. Therefore, even though these products may not do as they claim, they may remain on the market as long as they are not shown to be dangerous.

Safety

Herbal products may cause adverse reactions, just like traditional medicines can. The short- and long-term effects of herbal products have not been studied. The safety of these products for children, pregnant women, the elderly, and other special populations is not known. Those who have allergies, especially to plants or pollen, should use caution when using any herbal medicine.

Herbal Products and Warfarin

Herbal products, just like many foods and drugs, may interact with warfarin. Many herbals contain substances that are similar to warfarin and may put you at a higher risk for bleeding complications. There are also herbal products that work against the actions of warfarin and can make you more prone to developing clots.

Talk with your pharmacist about any herbal products you are thinking about taking while you are on warfarin to make sure you are not putting your health at risk. The tables on the next page list some common herbs that can either increase your risk of bleeding or increase your risk of forming blood clots. These herbs should not be taken while you are on warfarin.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Anticoagulation Clinics:

- University of Washington Medical Center:
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 - Seattle Cancer Care Alliance:
206-288-6756
 - Harborview Medical Center:
206-744-2976
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Herbs That Can Increase Risk of Bleeding

- agrimony
- alfalfa
- aniseed
- arnica flower
- artemesia
- asa foetida
- bochu
- bogbean
- bromelains
- capsicum
- cassio
- celery seed
- chamomile
- Chinese wolfberry
- clove
- dandelion
- danshen
- dihydroepiandrosterone
- dong quai
- fenugreek
- feverfew
- fish oil
- garlic
- ginger
- ginkgo
- horse chestnut
- horseradish
- licorice
- meadowsweet
- melilot
- onion
- papain
- parsley
- passionflower
- prickly ash
- poplar
- quassia
- red clover
- sweet clover
- sweet woodruff
- tonka beans
- turmeric
- wild carrot
- wild lettuce
- willow

Herbs That Can Increase Risk of Blood Clots

- coenzyme Q10
- ginseng
- goldenseal
- green tea
- St. John's wort
- yarrow

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*Seattle Cancer Care Alliance is a collaboration
of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center,
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