

What are Direct-Acting Oral Anticoagulants (DOACs)?

Anticoagulants, often called “blood thinners,” are used to treat certain blood vessel, heart and lung conditions, including atrial fibrillation (AFib), peripheral artery disease and venous thromboembolism. Anticoagulants help stop blood clots from forming in your body and may prevent existing clots from getting larger. They are prescribed for people with AFib because their irregular heartbeats can cause blood to collect in the heart and form a clot. If the clot travels to the brain and cuts off the oxygen and blood supply, it causes a stroke. About one in seven people who have a stroke also have AFib.



The more traditional anticoagulants are warfarin (Coumadin) and heparin. DOACs are a newer type of medication that may be easier to take if you are a good candidate for them.

What are the advantages of taking DOACs?

Traditional anticoagulants such as warfarin require monthly blood tests, and you have to pay attention to what you eat. It's also important to be aware of the risk of uncontrolled bleeding.

DOACs are highly effective. They don't require regular blood testing or special diets. They have also been found to lower the risk of bleeding (a risk with anticoagulants) when taken to prevent a stroke.

DOACs work and clear your system faster than warfarin. They are also believed to have fewer drug interactions.

What are the names of medications I may be prescribed?

Some DOAC medications are:

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

What should I know about taking DOACs?

Taking blood thinners can cause too much bleeding. Warfarin's effects usually can be reversed with vitamin K. Three DOACs — dabigatran, apixaban and rivaroxaban — have special reversal agents to stop bleeding.

You should always:

- Carry an anticoagulant alert card with you. Keep it in your purse or wallet so it can be found easily in an emergency. You can use the one provided on this sheet.
- Tell any family and all health care professionals that you take blood thinners.
- Take your medication exactly as your health care professional tells you. Don't stop without asking them. Doing so could increase your risk of stroke.
- Work with your health care team to plan when to stop taking your DOACs before a surgery or a test such as a colonoscopy.
- Wear a medical bracelet showing you take blood thinners if your health care professional recommends it.

(continued)



GETTING TO THE HEART OF STROKE™

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Could this medication cause problems?

If you follow your health care team's advice, there shouldn'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 cut yourself and have more bleeding than usual.
- 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 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?

MY QUESTIONS:

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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