Patient Information

YOU HAVE BEEN PRESCRIBED A

# DIRECT ORAL ANTICOAGULANT MEDICATION (DOAC)

NCP-VTE

National Clinical Programme in Venous Thromboembolism

*Clár Náisiúnta Trombóeambólachta Féithí*

HSE

## What is anticoagulant treatment?

An oral anticoagulant medicine prevents harmful clots from forming in your blood vessels by making your blood take longer to clot. These medicines may be called “blood-thinners.”

Anticoagulant medicines are used to stop existing clots from getting bigger and to help prevent a clot travelling to other parts of the body.

The oral anticoagulants used in Ireland are warfarin, and direct oral anticoagulants (also known as DOACs, or NOACs). This leaflet refers to DOACs only; if you are prescribed warfarin, you need a different booklet.

There are currently four DOACs available in Ireland:

- Apixaban (Eliquis®)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa®)
- Edoxaban (Lixiana®)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)

## Why do I need an oral anticoagulant?

You are prescribed a DOAC if you are at risk of developing a harmful clot, or if you have an existing clot, such as in the following conditions:

- Atrial Fibrillation – irregular heartbeat
- Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) – clot in the leg or arm
- Pulmonary Embolism (PE) – clot in the lung
- DOACs may be used for other conditions also.

Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you are not sure of your diagnosis.

## How do I take an oral anticoagulant?

- The dose will depend on which DOAC you are prescribed, and the reason you need to take it. Some are prescribed once daily and some twice daily.
- Check the label on your medicine for dosing instructions and discuss with your pharmacist.
- Try to take your medicine at the same time each day.
- It is important to take **Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®) tablets with food**. Take Apixaban, Edoxaban & Dabigatran with or without food.
- If you have trouble swallowing your medicine, talk to your pharmacist, nurse or doctor.
- Do not break open Dabigatran (Pradaxa®) capsules.
- The length of time you need to take a DOAC for, will depend on the reason you need to take it. Some may need to take a DOAC for months, others may need to take it for longer, and some for the rest of their lives.

## Do I need blood tests to monitor a DOAC?

- These medicines do not require a specific blood test to monitor their effect on blood clotting (as is the case with older anticoagulants such as warfarin).
- However, it is important you attend for a blood test at least once a year to check your kidney function and other health checks.
- Blood tests may need to be done more often if you are over 65 years, if you become very dehydrated, suddenly unwell, or have any other medical conditions.

## What do I do if I forget to take a dose of a DOAC?

- It is important that you do not miss a dose, as your protection against a blood clot may be reduced.
- If you do miss a dose, read the patient information leaflet in your anticoagulant medication pack. Call a pharmacist or doctor for advice if necessary.
- Do not take a double- dose to make up for a missed dose.

## What do I do If I take too much medication?

Contact a doctor, pharmacist or nurse and seek medical attention straight away if you take too many tablets, as you may be at an increased risk of bleeding.

## What are the side effects of DOACs?

It is not unusual to bruise easily while you are taking a DOAC, and bleeding will take longer to stop if you cut yourself. The bleeding should stop when pressure is applied for a few minutes, with a clean dry dressing. Severe bleeding is the most serious side effect, although this is rare.

**Less serious:**

- Heartburn, indigestion, stomach-ache
- Nausea (feeling sick), mild diarrhoea (loose stool)
- Mild skin rash or skin itch
- Minor bruising
- Women: heavier periods than usual

**Talk to your pharmacist, nurse, or doctor**

**More serious:**

- Cuts that will not stop bleeding, nosebleeds (longer than 10 minutes)
- Coughing up blood
- Blood in vomit
- Blood in stool (red or black faeces)
- Blood in urine (red or dark brown pee)
- Severe or unexplained bruising
- Sudden, severe headache
- New episode of dizziness or weakness

**Contact your doctor immediately or go to your nearest Emergency Department.**

**Very serious:**

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face, lips, throat, or tongue
- Hives, skin rash or itching
- Severe bloody diarrhoea
- Severe bruising or bleeding
- Seizures

**Call an ambulance at once. You may be having a serious bleed or an allergic reaction. Dial 999 or 112 for Emergency Services.**

This is not a complete list of side effects. For specific advice on individual DOACs, refer to your patient information leaflet in your medicine pack. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about any side effects that you experience.

## Can I play sports?

Continue to do regular exercise and play sports. You may need to avoid any activity or sport that may result in a serious fall or injury such as certain contact sports. Discuss with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.

## How can I avoid injuries?

- When taking a DOAC, you can do all your normal daily activities, but you are at risk of excess bleeding if you get injured.
- If you do cut or hurt yourself, clean and treat minor cuts and scrapes immediately. Even if there are no visible signs of injury tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about any falls or knocks to the head or body.
- If you are having any other treatments from healthcare or complementary therapists e.g. Physiotherapist, Osteopath, Acupuncturist, or any other treatments that can cause bleeding, tell them in advance that you are taking an anticoagulant.

## What happens if I need a medical or dental procedure?

- Bleeding from medical and dental procedures may be increased if you are taking an anticoagulant.
- Tell your doctor or dentist that you are taking an anticoagulant (DOAC) well before any planned procedures. These may include operations or minor procedures in the hospital/GP surgery/dental practice. Your doctor/dentist will tell you when you need to stop taking your medication if necessary, and when to restart it.
- **Do not stop taking your DOAC medication unless you have discussed the situation with your doctor.**

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding:

- DOACs should not be taken during pregnancy or breastfeeding. If you plan to become pregnant, talk to your doctor straight away.
- If you think you are pregnant, do a pregnancy test immediately, and seek urgent medical advice.
- Do not stop taking your medicine, without speaking to a doctor.

## Can I take other medications with an anticoagulant?

- As other medicines may interact with DOACs, you need to check with a pharmacist or doctor before starting any new medicines or stopping any medicines.
- **Always let the pharmacist know you are taking an anticoagulant (DOAC) before you buy any medicines or supplements without a prescription, as some are not suitable to take.**
- Always let the doctor know you are taking an anticoagulant (DOAC) before you get a new prescription medicine.
- Avoid taking any medicines that may increase your risk of bleeding (such as anti-inflammatory medicines; examples include Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Diclofenac, Naproxen) unless your doctor has specifically prescribed them for you.
- Paracetamol may be taken for pain if necessary. Always check with your pharmacist.

## Do I need to change my diet or alcohol intake?

- You do not need to change what you eat when taking a DOAC. You should maintain a healthy and balanced diet.
- We recommend that you do not drink more than the safe limits of alcohol per week, as this can increase your risk of bleeding. Check current HSE alcohol guidelines.
- Discuss with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.

## Can I get vaccinations?

- You can have vaccinations if you are taking an anticoagulant. You will need to tell the Nurse, Doctor or Pharmacist that you are taking an oral anticoagulant so they can monitor you.

## Notes

## Notes

**For further information or support, please contact the Irish Heart Foundation. Now supporting blood clot patients through their recovery.**
**PH. 01 668 5001**
**Email info@irishheart.ie**
**CHY5507 -Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20008376**