

## Treatment with Dabigatran

### *Pradaxa*

*This handout explains the medicine dabigatran, a drug that helps prevent blood clots.*

### What is dabigatran?

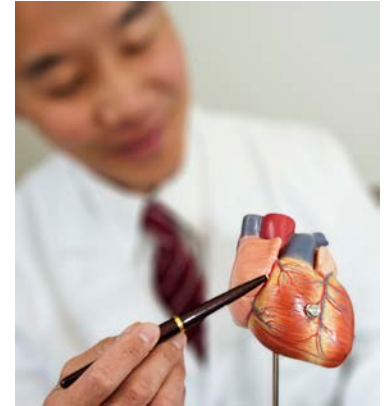
Dabigatran (brand name Pradaxa) is an *anticoagulant* medicine. “Anti” means against, and “coagulant” refers to blood clotting. An anticoagulant helps prevent clots from forming in your blood.

Sometimes dabigatran is called a “blood-thinner,” but it does not really make your blood thinner. It works by keeping a natural part of your blood from forming clots.

### Why am I taking dabigatran?

Your doctor has prescribed dabigatran to prevent harmful blood clots from forming. Blood clots can occur in people who have a heart condition called *atrial fibrillation*.

In atrial fibrillation, part of the heart does not beat the way it should. This can make blood clots form within the heart. Parts of these clots can break off and travel to the brain. A blood clot in the brain can cause a stroke. Dabigatran lowers the chance of clots forming and causing a stroke.



*Your doctor has prescribed dabigatran to keep harmful blood clots from forming.*

### How does dabigatran work?

Many things must happen inside the body for a blood clot to form. Natural parts of the blood called *clotting factors* are involved in each step of this process. *Thrombin* is the clotting factor that dabigatran blocks. Blocking thrombin prevents harmful clots from forming.

Dabigatran can help stop clots from forming and keep clots from getting larger, but it does not break up clots that are there already.

*Dabigatran comes in 75 mg or 150 mg capsules. Your doctor will decide which dose is right for you. It is taken 2 times a day.*

## **How long does it take for dabigatran to work?**

Dabigatran begins to reduce blood clotting within a few hours after taking the first dose. If you stop taking dabigatran, its effects on clotting begin to wear off within 24 hours for most people.

## **How much dabigatran should I take?**

Dabigatran comes as a capsule in doses of 75 mg or 150 mg. The usual dose of dabigatran is one 150 mg capsule taken twice a day. For people with certain types of kidney problems, the dose may be 75 mg twice a day. Your doctor will decide which dose is right for you.

## **How should I take dabigatran?**

Dabigatran capsules come in a bottle or in a blister package (a type of packaging that allows you to remove just 1 capsule at a time).

When it is time to take your dose of dabigatran:

- Remove **only** your prescribed dose from your open bottle or blister package.
- **Tightly close the bottle right away** after removing your dose.
- Do not put dabigatran in pillboxes or pill organizers. **Keep dabigatran in the original bottle or blister package.**
- Swallow dabigatran whole. **Do not break, crush or chew the capsule.** Do not open the capsule to sprinkle the medicine inside it on food or into drinks.
- You can take dabigatran with or without food.
- Open and use only 1 bottle of dabigatran at a time.
- After you open a bottle, the medicine must be used within 4 months. If you do not finish the bottle within 4 months, it must be safely thrown away. Then you need to start a new bottle.

## **How should I store dabigatran?**

- Keep dabigatran in the bottle or blister package it came in. This will protect the capsules from moisture in the air.
- Store the bottle or blister package at room temperature. Do **not** keep it in the kitchen or bathroom.
- Tightly close the bottle of dabigatran right away after you take your dose.

- *Dabigatran can be taken with or without food.*
- *Do not crush, chew or open the capsule.*
- *Tightly close the bottle right away after removing your dose.*
- *Do not put dabigatran in pillboxes or pill organizers. Keep dabigatran in the original bottle or blister package.*

*Dabigatran does not require any routine blood testing.*

## **When should I take dabigatran?**

Take dabigatran twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, about 12 hours apart. Take it at the same time each day.

## **What should I do if I miss a dose?**

Try not to miss any doses of dabigatran. If you do miss a dose:

- If your next dose is **6 or more hours away**, take the missed dose as soon as you remember.
- If your next dose is **less than 6 hours away**, skip the missed dose.
- **Never** take 2 doses of dabigatran at the same time.
- **If you take too much dabigatran, call your doctor right away or go to the nearest emergency room.**

Do not run out of dabigatran. Refill your prescription before you run out. The clot-fighting effects of dabigatran begin to wear off when 2 or more doses in a row have been missed. For most people, this raises their risk of having a stroke.

## **When to Call Your Doctor**

**Call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room right away if you have any of these symptoms:**

- Sudden weakness in an arm or leg
- Sudden numbness or tingling anywhere in your body
- Changes in eyesight or not being able to see out of one or both eyes
- Suddenly having slurred speech or not being able to speak
- Dizziness or faintness

## **Do I need to have my blood tested while taking dabigatran?**

You will not need to have routine blood tests to adjust your dose or to check the amount of dabigatran in your body. But, your dose of dabigatran is based on how well your kidneys are working. Because of this, your doctor may want you to have a blood test from time to time to check the health of your kidneys.

## **What are the side effects of dabigatran?**

### **Bleeding**

The most serious side effect of dabigatran is bleeding. Dabigatran can cause bleeding that can sometimes lead to death.

*The most serious and common side effect of dabigatran is bleeding. Other common side effects are stomach upset, belly pain, and indigestion.*

Very minor bleeding may occur. This is normal, and it may cause any of these symptoms from time to time:

- Gums bleeding when you brush your teeth
- Nosebleeds
- Easy bruising
- Bleeding more than normal from small cuts
- For women, longer or heavier menstrual bleeding

But, call your doctor or come to the hospital emergency room **right away** if you:

- Have a serious fall or hit your head.
- Have any of these symptoms of **major bleeding**:
  - Red or dark brown urine
  - Red or black, tarry stool
  - Vomiting or coughing up blood
  - Severe headache or stomachache
  - Bruises that appear for no known reason
  - Frequent nosebleeds, bleeding gums, or unusual bleeding
  - Any bleeding that does not stop or is very heavy

**There is no medicine that can reverse the effects of dabigatran if you do start to bleed. Your doctor will treat you with blood transfusions and other methods.**

### **Other Side Effects**

Other common side effects of dabigatran are:

- Stomach upset
- Belly pain
- Indigestion

### **Does dabigatran affect how any other medicines work?**

You may have a higher risk of bleeding if you take dabigatran and other medicines that also lower your blood's ability to form clots. Some of these medicines are:

- Aspirin or products that contain aspirin, such as Excedrin, Alka-Seltzer, Bayer, Bufferin, Nyquil, and Pepto-Bismol

*Call your doctor or the anticoagulation clinic whenever you start or stop any prescription or over-the-counter medicine, herbal product, or vitamin supplement.*

*Drug interactions with dabigatran can increase your risk of bleeding.*

*Taking dabigatran does not require you to avoid eating certain foods. It is best to avoid drinking alcohol while taking dabigatran. If you do drink, see the guidelines on this page.*

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, and others), celecoxib (Celebrex), diclofenac (Cataflam, Voltaren), indomethacin (Indocin), ketoprofen (Actron, Orudis), meloxicam (Mobic), nabumetone (Relafen), naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, and others), piroxicam (Feldene), and others
- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Any medicine that contains heparin
- Clopidogrel (Plavix), prasugrel (Effient), ticagrelor (Brilinta)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto), apixaban (Eliquis)

**If you are taking dabigatran, never take any of these medicines without first checking with your doctor or anticoagulation clinic.**

**Other drugs may also affect how dabigatran works in your body.** It is very important to tell your doctor or anticoagulation clinic whenever you start or stop any medicine. This includes medicines you can buy without a prescription, herbal products, and vitamins.

## **Is it safe to drink alcohol while taking dabigatran?**

It is best to avoid alcohol if you take dabigatran. This is because it can increase the risk of bleeding in your stomach and intestines. If you do drink alcohol, do not have more than 1 drink a day, and no more than 2 drinks at a time every now and then. (One drink is 1 beer, **or** 1 glass of wine, **or** 1 cocktail, **or** 1 shot.)

## **Do I need to avoid eating certain foods while taking dabigatran?**

You can eat all types of foods if you take dabigatran. There are no restrictions.

You can take dabigatran with or without food.

## **Should I limit activities while taking dabigatran?**

Since dabigatran increases your risk of bleeding, you should avoid activities that could cause an injury. Tell your doctor or anticoagulation clinic pharmacist or nurse what your current activities are. They will tell you if it is safe to keep doing these while taking dabigatran. It is usually safe to walk, jog, swim, and work in the garden.

## **What if I get sick?**

Call your doctor or anticoagulation clinic if you get sick and cannot take your dabigatran doses. Also see “What should I do if I miss a dose?” on page 3.

*Remember to tell all your health care providers that you are taking dabigatran. If you must stop dabigatran for any reason, tell the doctor who prescribed dabigatran for you.*

## **Who should I tell I am taking dabigatran?**

It is very important to tell **all** your health care providers that you are taking dabigatran. This includes your doctors, dentist, and all pharmacists where you have prescriptions filled. Being on dabigatran may affect how they care for you in certain medical situations.

Carry a wallet card that says you take dabigatran. Consider wearing a medical alert bracelet or necklace that will tell emergency health care providers that you take dabigatran.

## **Are there any times I should stop taking dabigatran?**

- You may need to stop taking dabigatran for one or more days before surgery or other medical or dental procedures.
- If you need to stop taking dabigatran for any reason, call the doctor who prescribed it for you. Ask when you should stop taking dabigatran. This doctor will also tell you when to start taking dabigatran again after your surgery or procedure.

## **What about pregnancy?**

Dabigatran has not been studied in pregnant women. If you become pregnant or plan to become pregnant while taking dabigatran, call your doctor **right away** to talk about the benefits and risks of taking dabigatran while you are pregnant.

## **Questions?**

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

Anticoagulation Clinic:  
206-598-4874