

UW Medicine



Herbal Products

If you take warfarin (Coumadin)

This handout explains what patients who take warfarin (Coumadin) need to know before they take herbal products.

Why do I need to be careful of herbal products?

Many herbal products can provide benefits, but many do not work well with warfarin. If you take warfarin, some herbs may put you at higher risk for bleeding problems or for getting blood clots.

BEFORE you take any herbal product or dietary supplement, talk with your pharmacist or Anticoagulation Clinic.

They can help you make informed choices.

What should I know about herbal products?

Quality

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines. But, herbal products do not have to go through the FDA's testing to make sure that they are safe and that they work.

This means that herbal products may contain varying amounts of the herb, have ingredients that are not listed on the label, or even have contaminants. This can result in:

- *Instability* of the herb (it may not be as effective as claimed)
- Products with similar names and labels may have very different effects



Talk with your clinic or pharmacist before taking any herbal products.



Signs of Bleeding Problems

- Unusual bleeding from gums
- Ongoing 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

- *Toxicity* (too much of the product in your body at one time, or unwanted side effects)

Effectiveness

Before any prescription drug can be sold, the FDA requires that the product be tested for effectiveness. Because the FDA does not regulate herbal products, we do not know how effective they are. Herbal products may stay on the market as long as they are not dangerous, whether or not they do what they claim to do.

Safety

Herbal products may cause side effects, just like man-made medicines can. The short- and long-term effects of herbal products have not been studied. Most times, we do not know how safe these products are for children, pregnant women, the elderly, and other special groups. If you have any allergies, especially to plants or pollen, use extra caution when using any herbal medicine.

Herbal Products and Warfarin

Some herbal products, just like many foods and drugs, may interact with warfarin:

- Herbs that contain substances that are similar to warfarin may put you at a higher risk for bleeding problems.
- Herbs that work against the actions of warfarin can make it more likely that you will get blood clots.

Talk with your pharmacist about any herbal products you are thinking about taking. The lists on the next page show some common herbs that can either increase your risk of bleeding or increase your risk of forming blood clots.

Herbs to Avoid

While you are on warfarin, do **not** take the herbs listed below.

These herbs can increase your risk of bleeding:

- agrimony
- alfalfa
- aniseed
- arnica flower
- artemesia
- asa foetida
- bochu
- bogbean
- bromelains
- capsicum
- cassia
- 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

Questions?

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

Anticoagulation

Clinics:

- UWMC - Montlake:
206.598.4874
- UWMC - Northwest:
206.668.1282
- Seattle Cancer Care
Alliance: 206.606.6756
- Harborview Medical Center:
206.744.2976

These herbs can increase your risk of blood clots:

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