

# Treatment with Dabigatran

*Pradaxa*

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

## What is dabigatran?

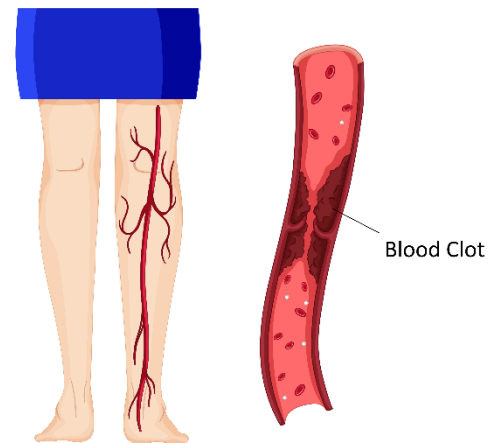
Dabigatran (brand name Pradaxa) is an *anticoagulant* medicine. “Anti” means against, and “coagulant” refers to blood clotting. An anticoagulant helps prevent clots from forming in your blood.

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

## Why am I taking it?

Your doctor has prescribed dabigatran to treat or prevent blood clots. You may have one of these conditions that can cause clots:

- **Atrial fibrillation:** If part of the heart does not beat the way it should, blood clots can form within the heart. Parts of these clots can break off, travel to the brain, and cause a stroke.
- **Surgery:** Blood clots may form after surgery, including surgery to replace a hip or knee.
- **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE):**  
A DVT is a blood clot that forms in a vein, usually in the legs.  
A PE is a clot that is in the lung.



***A blood clot inside a vein.***

## 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 this process.

Dabigatran blocks one of these clotting factors, called *thrombin*. Dabigatran can help stop clots from forming and can keep clots from getting larger, but it does not break up clots that already exist.

## How long does dabigatran take to work?

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



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## How much dabigatran should I take?

Dabigatran comes in 75 mg, 110 mg, and 150 mg tablets. Your doctor will decide which dose is right for you. Your dose will depend on how well your kidneys are working, and other medicines you take.

These are the usual doses for the 3 common conditions:

|                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Atrial fibrillation</b> | 150 mg, 2 times a day |
| <b>After surgery</b>       | 110 mg, 2 times a day |
| <b>DVT and PE</b>          | 150 mg, 2 times a day |

## How should I take dabigatran?

Dabigatran capsules come in a bottle or in a *blister package*. This type of packaging 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. Unused pills must be protected from moisture in the air.
- **Tightly close the bottle right away** after removing your dose.
- **Keep dabigatran in the original bottle or blister package.** Do not put dabigatran in pillboxes or pill organizers.
- Swallow dabigatran **whole** with a full glass of water:
  - **Do not break, crush or chew the capsule.**
  - Do **not** open the capsule to sprinkle the medicine on food or into drinks.
  - Talk with your doctor if you have trouble swallowing capsules.
- You can take dabigatran with or without food.
- Open and use only 1 bottle of dabigatran at a time.
- After you open a bottle, you must use the medicine within 4 months. If you do not finish the bottle within 4 months, it must be safely thrown away (see the last bullet under “How do I store dabigatran” on page 3). Then you need to start a new bottle.
- Take dabigatran exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Take it at the same time each day, in the morning and at night.
- Do **not** stop taking dabigatran unless your doctor tells you to.

## How do I store dabigatran?

- Keep dabigatran in the bottle or blister package it came in. This protects 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.
- Keep all medicines in a safe place, out of the reach of children and pets.
- Put unused or expired medicines in the trash. Do **not** flush them down a toilet or pour them down a drain, unless you are told to do so. Ask your pharmacist about the best way to throw away extra medicines.

## 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 I need refills?

Do **not** run out of dabigatran. Refill your prescription **before** you run out. The clot-fighting effects begin to wear off if you miss 2 or more doses in a row. **This can be very dangerous.**

## What are the side effects of dabigatran?

Light bleeding is normal with dabigatran. Heavy bleeding is more serious.

### Light Bleeding

You may have any of these symptoms from time to time:

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

### Heavy Bleeding

Dabigatran can also cause severe bleeding that could lead to death (see “When to Call Your Doctor” below). **If you start to bleed, there is a medicine that can reverse the effects of dabigatran. Call your doctor or go to the emergency room right away.** Your doctor may also treat you with blood transfusions and other methods.

## Other Side Effects

Other common side effects of dabigatran are:

- Stomach upset
- Belly pain
- Indigestion

## When to Call Your Doctor

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

- 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
- New pain, swelling, redness, or heat in your arm, leg, or foot
- New shortness of breath or chest pain
- A serious fall or hit your head
- Any bleeding that does not stop or is very heavy
- Signs of **serious bleeding**:
  - Bleeding in your eyes
  - Red or dark brown urine
  - Red or black tarry stool
  - Vomiting or coughing up blood (vomit may look like coffee grounds)
  - Severe headache or stomachache
  - Bruises that appear for no known reason
  - Nosebleeds, bleeding gums, or unusual bleeding that keeps happening

## 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. If you are taking dabigatran, **do NOT take any of these medicines without first checking with your doctor or anticoagulation clinic:**

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

- Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and other *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs* (NSAIDs) such as celecoxib (Celebrex), diclofenac (Cataflam, Voltaren), indomethacin (Indocin), ketoprofen (Actron, Orudis), meloxicam (Mobic), nabumetone (Relafen), naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, and others), and piroxicam (Feldene)
- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix), prasugrel (Effient), ticagrelor (Brilinta)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto), apixaban (Eliquis), edoxaban (Savaysa), betrixaban (Bevyxxa)

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

## Who should I tell I am taking dabigatran?

Tell **all** your healthcare 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. You may also want to wear 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?

- Your doctor may tell you to stop taking dabigatran for 1 or more days before medical or dental procedures, including surgery.
- You **must** stop taking dabigatran before any procedure that uses an *epidural catheter*. This is a tube that is placed in your back for pain medicine and anesthesia.
- If you need to stop taking dabigatran for any reason, call the doctor who prescribed it for you. Find out when you should stop taking it. This doctor will also tell you when to start taking dabigatran again after your surgery or procedure.



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

## Questions You May Have While Taking Dabigatran

### Q. Do I need to have regular blood tests?

You do **not** need to have routine blood testing to check the amount of dabigatran in your body. But the 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. You may also need yearly blood counts and liver function tests.

### Q. Can I drink alcohol?

**It is best to avoid alcohol while taking dabigatran.**

Alcohol 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 = 1 beer, or 1 glass of wine, or 1 cocktail, or 1 shot.

### Q. Should I limit activities?

Since dabigatran increases your risk of bleeding:

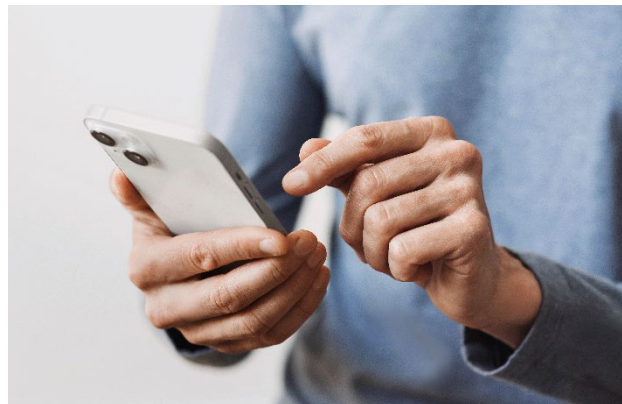
- Avoid activities that could cause an injury. It is usually safe to walk, jog, swim, and work in the garden.
- Tell your doctor or anticoagulation clinic pharmacist or nurse what your current activities are. They will tell you if it is safe to keep doing these while taking dabigatran.

### Q. What if I get sick?

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

### Q. Can I take dabigatran if I am pregnant?

We do not know how dabigatran affects pregnancy or unborn babies. 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.



***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.***

### 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

**Harborview Medical Center:**

206.744.2976