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Your Metabolism

Our body’s metabolism is a complex physical and chemical process by which our body converts what you eat and drink into energy. The energy is released into your body when the calories from the food you eat are mixed with oxygen. Your body uses the energy to help fuel functions such as breathing, regulating hormones, and for cell repair and growth. Your body uses energy whether you are active or resting.

The number of calories your body burns carries out its most basic functions, such as breathing, circulation, etc., is called the basal metabolic rate. This metabolic rate does not easily change since the amount of energy your body needs for basic functions is fairly consistent. You can determine your basal metabolic rate (BMR) using a standard formula, or by using online calculators that ask you to input your age, sex, weight, height, and sometimes your body fat percentage. Many individuals use this number to help understand how many daily calories you need to consume to either maintain your current weight or lose weight.

There are several factors that determine the number of calories your body uses to carry out those basic functions: 2, 3, 4

- **Body composition and size** – larger individuals with more muscle burn more calories.
- **Male or female** – men tend to burn more calories.
- **Your age** – BMR decreases by 5% per decade after age 40.

As you can see from the factors above, not everyone burns calories at the same rate. While you don’t have much control over the speed of your metabolism, you can control how many calories you burn with physical activity and exercise.

How does my metabolism affect medicine, like warfarin?

How a drug is absorbed in your body depends on several factors, including blood flow and metabolic activity. For warfarin specifically, the drug is more dependent on your metabolism and physical activity. Although much is still unknown about the interactions between exercise and medications, one study did find that increasing physical activity in patients taking warfarin has been shown to decrease the International Normalized Ratio (INR).6

Talk to your doctor about your weight, questions about metabolism, and your exercise routine. Any change in physical activity should be discussed with your doctor so they can monitor the effect, if any, that your new exercise regime has on your INR results and warfarin dosing.

There have not been many studies regarding getting a tattoo while a patient is on warfarin, especially ones focusing on the potential amount of bleeding that may occur. Some degree of bleeding is common for tattoos even in people who are not taking warfarin.10

Tattooing involves piercing the skin with needles bearing various pigments. The tattoo ink is pulled up into the tattoo machine needle from the ink cups.11 Because additional bleeding may be possible for someone taking warfarin, more ink may be needed. Since it is uncertain how much or whether bleeding may occur while getting a tattoo, many tattoo artists refuse to tattoo people taking warfarin. In some cases, a note from your doctor giving permission for the tattoo may be accepted. Overall, if you are interested in getting a tattoo while taking warfarin or other anticoagulants, it is best to talk to your doctor before getting it done.

Safety: Weather, Emergencies, & Natural Disasters

Being prepared helps you deal with disasters of all sorts much more effectively when they do occur. It is especially important to those living in places where extreme weather and natural disasters are most likely. Regardless of the type of event, it’s best to have an emergency kit put together. The kit should be checked regularly and any expired or outdated items replaced.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Red Cross, every household should:

- Develop a family disaster plan
- Buy or prepare an emergency kit
- Be informed. Examples include being aware of local shelters, quarantine, evacuation routes, etc.

Although it is important to be prepared for any emergency or type of hazard, it is also important to keep in mind that some emergencies may require different preparations or response. For example, you may need to prepare a different emergency plan for earthquakes than for tornadoes. The CDC has a list of preparations and responses at http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/ concerning the different potential natural disasters and severe weather you may encounter.

For more information on living healthy while on warfarin, go to PTINR.com.

Q&A: Can I get a tattoo while taking warfarin?

Moving to Generic Warfarin

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) reports that nearly eight out of ten prescriptions are filled with the generic form of the medications.8, 9 Coumadin® medication is the name brand of the anticoagulation medication that has been used for over sixty years. There are many different manufacturers that make generic Coumadin® medication, often called warfarin.

There have been no studies comparing one generic form of warfarin to another so there is no way of knowing how you will respond. It is recommended that you fill your prescription at the same pharmacy to increase your chances of the same manufacturer of your warfarin tablets. You should also look beyond just the colors being the same. Manufacturers use the shape of the tablet to differentiate their warfarin product over another.

Because there are slight differences in the way the generic medications are made, you may see a slight variation in your INR when you switch from name brand to generic. To be consistent, you should stick to using one form or the other rather than frequently changing back and forth between generic and name brand. Talk to your doctor about the difference between the brand name and generic medications and if they prefer you to stay with one or the other.
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HEALTH TIP

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The Flu

As a patient on warfarin, you are no more prone to getting the flu than people not taking warfarin. However, there are some facts about the flu to keep in mind.

Each year, influenza (the flu) arrives in the fall and lingers until late spring. The flu is caused by a specific strain of virus that changes from year to year and affects between 5% and 20% of the population. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention advises an annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months of age and older. Frequently washing your hands with warm, soapy water is also an effective strategy to reduce flu transmission.

The flu shot may result in an elevation of your International Normalized Ratio (INR) test result, but you should not be discouraged from getting one. You should communicate your desire to receive a flu shot with your physician.

Experts recommend that you drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest if you have flu symptoms. Avoiding alcohol and tobacco is also highly recommended. Additionally, you should have all over-the-counter products approved by your doctor prior taking them; especially if they are herbal, natural, or holistic in nature.