



## Situational Safety: Creams & Ointments

Patients do not often think of over-the-counter (OTC) creams and ointments as products that can interact with prescription drugs. Warfarin patients may want to ask their healthcare professional about the risks of a cream or ointment before using it for pain relief.

Many patients are aware that warfarin can interact with many OTC medications, as it does with many prescription drugs. It is generally accepted that medications taken by mouth are readily accessible to the bloodstream, and therefore may interact with warfarin. Products that are applied to the skin are called 'topical' medications. Fewer patients realize that topical medicines, which are rubbed directly onto the skin, can also enter the bloodstream and interact with other medications.

Patients should assume that topical medications, including pain-relieving creams and ointments, have the same potential to interact with warfarin as medicine taken by mouth. Since OTC products generally lack the strength of prescription medications, patients feel they carry less risk of an unwanted drug interaction. Patients often use OTC drugs at higher frequency and at higher doses, making them as potent as some prescription medication and increasing the possibility of a drug interaction with warfarin.

Topical pain relievers are frequently used by patients on warfarin and may pose an interaction risk. Common topical pain relievers include Ben Gay<sup>®</sup>, Aspercreame<sup>®</sup>, Flexall<sup>®</sup> and Sportscreame<sup>®</sup>. A common ingredient in these products is salicylates. Salicylates are the same ingredient found in the oral pain medications containing aspirin. These compounds may work by inhibiting prostaglandins, hormone-like substances that contribute to pain and inflammation.<sup>1</sup> Patients should not begin or discontinue the use of any product containing salicylates without first checking with their doctor. An increased risk of bleeding is associated with aspirin-type products.<sup>2</sup>

Source: [www.PTINR.com](http://www.PTINR.com)

- 1 (2008). Before you buy topical pain relievers. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from About.com: Senior Health Web site: [http://seniorhealth.about.com/library/byb/aabyb\\_top\\_pain.htm](http://seniorhealth.about.com/library/byb/aabyb_top_pain.htm)
- 2 Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. (2007). *Medication Guide for Coumadin Tablets and Coumadin for Injection* [Package Insert]. Princeton, NJ: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company.



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