



Situational Safety: OTC Products

Drug interactions are unwanted effects of taking two or more medications together. Over-the-counter (OTC) medications can interact with Warfarin (Coumadin®) as frequently, and may cause the same problems, as prescription-strength medications. Interactions resulting in decreased INR test results place warfarin patients at an increased risk of potentially dangerous blood clot formation. Interactions where INR test results increase above a patient's target range raise the risk of bleeding.

Warfarin is among the leading medications involved in drug interactions, resulting in either an increased or decreased intensity of anticoagulation.¹ Patients might misinterpret the safety of OTC medications. OTC products of particular concern include:

Aspirin

Cough & Cold Medications

Pain Relievers

Sports Creams

Herbal Products

Vitamins

Weight Loss Products

Arthritis Products

There are many OTC products that can interact with warfarin. Product labels, which are designed to educate the consumer, often have print too small for patients to easily read. Patients should never start or stop medications such as aspirin or topical pain relievers without first talking to a healthcare professional, as the risk of bleeding may increase.²

Patients taking warfarin should request a list of approved medications for colds, fever, allergies, cough, arthritis, and pain relief from their doctor. Such a list will make shopping for safe OTC products easier. Product labels do not always include all the cautions and warnings necessary to keep warfarin patients safe. Patients should always consult their healthcare provider regarding the use of any medication.

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- 1 Newman, D. (2006). The prevalence of non-therapeutic and dangerous internal normalized ratios among patients receiving warfarin in the emergency department. *American College of Emergency Physicians*, 48, 182-189.
- 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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