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## Direct Oral Anticoagulation Therapy



## Patient information

# Direct Oral Anticoagulation Therapy



## **What is a Direct Oral Anticoagulant?**

Blood clots are usually treated with drugs that reduce the ability of the blood to clot (anticoagulants). Anticoagulants do not break down or dissolve an existing clot but they do prevent it from growing bigger and reduce the risk of further clots forming. Warfarin is an anticoagulant that is often prescribed and a newer group of anticoagulants that have been recommended for some patients are known as 'Direct Oral Anticoagulants' (DOACs). In the UK DOACs include apixaban, dabigatran, edoxaban and rivaroxaban.

DOACs are also used to reduce the risk of stroke in people with atrial fibrillation (AF). Having AF increases the risk of a blood clot forming in the heart. If this clot travels to the brain, it may cause a stroke. Taking a DOAC slows down the time it takes for your blood to clot and reduces the risk of this happening.

## **How do I know how much to take?**

Each patient is individual and so the dose prescribed may vary from patient to patient depending on why you require the anticoagulant. The healthcare professional who prescribes your medication will be able to advise you on the dose best suited for your medical needs.

## **How do I take my DOAC?**

It is very important to take the medication regularly and at the same time each day. If you forget to take one dose, read the instructions that come with the tablets to guide you on what to do. You must read the pharmacy label and take the tablets exactly as prescribed. Take each dose with a glass of water. Rivaroxaban should be taken with food.

## **What side effects might I have from a DOAC?**

The main side effect of an anticoagulant may be unexpected bleeding or bruising. If you experience any of the following, you must contact your GP, clinic or NHS 111 as soon as possible:

- Prolonged nose bleeds (lasting more than 10 minutes).
- Prolonged bleeding from cuts.
- Blood in vomit or sputum (spit), bleeding gums.
- Blood in urine (urine coloured pink or brown).
- Blood in stool or black tarry stools.
- Unusual headaches.
- It is common for women to experience heavy or increased bleeding during their period. If you are concerned about the increased bleeding, contact your doctor or clinic.
- Some patients experience nausea, diarrhoea and/or heartburn. If these symptoms persist, contact your GP or clinic.
- Seek immediate medical help if you suffer major trauma or a blow to the head or are unable to stop bleeding.

## **How long will I need to take a DOAC?**

The length of treatment depends on your medical history and the condition requiring treatment. Your doctor will discuss this with you when you start taking the anticoagulation treatment.

## **What happens if I need dental treatment or an operation whilst I am taking a DOAC?**

Tell your healthcare professional team before any operation or dental treatment that you are taking a DOAC. They will decide the management of your DOAC before and after your procedure and should give you a verbal and written detailed information sheet about what you will need to stop. Each case is individually assessed. It is important to follow the instructions of the healthcare professional to avoid any cancellation or severe bleeding due to your DOAC.

## **Will I need blood tests to monitor my DOAC?**

DOACs do not require routine blood test monitoring. It is recommended that your kidney function is checked prior to starting treatment and at least annually while on treatment. If you develop issues with your kidneys such as kidney infection or abnormal kidney blood tests you should contact your clinic or doctor as your dose may need to be adjusted.

## **What if I forget a dose?**

It depends on which DOAC you are taking:

**Apixaban:** Take the tablet as soon as you remember and take the following tablets at the usual time then continue as normal.

**Dabigatran:** A forgotten dose can still be taken up to 6 hours prior to the next due dose. A missed dose should be omitted if the remaining time is below 6 hours prior to the next due dose. Do not take a double dose to make up for missed doses.

**Edoxaban:** Take the dose as soon as you remember. Do not take more than one tablet in a single day to make up for the forgotten dose. Take the next tablet on the following day and then carry on taking one tablet once a day.

**Rivaroxaban:** If you are taking either **one 20mg tablet once a day** or **one 15mg tablet once a day** and have missed a dose, take it as soon as you remember. Do not take more than one tablet in a single day to make up for a forgotten dose. Take the next tablet on the following day and then carry on taking one tablet once a day.

If you are taking **one 15mg tablet twice a day** and have missed a dose, take it as soon as you remember. Do not take more than two 15mg tablets in a single day. If you forget to take a dose you can take up to two 15mg tablets at the same time to get a total of two tablets (30mg) on one day. On the following day you should carry on taking one 15mg tablet twice a day.

If you are taking **one 2.5mg tablet twice a day** and you have missed a dose, simply take your next dose at the usual time.

## **What should I do if I keep forgetting my tablets?**

Missing tablets will increase your risk of having a stroke, heart attack or another clot. If you have difficulty remembering to take your DOAC you should speak to your doctor or pharmacist who will be able to advise you.

## **What should I do if I take too many tablets?**

If you have taken too many tablets at once, you may have an increased risk of bleeding. Contact your doctor immediately. Take your medication with you to show the doctor.

### **Can I take other medicines with a DOAC?**

Your GP or clinic will review all of your medicines before you start a DOAC, and they will make any necessary changes to medications if needed.

Whenever your medication is changed or you are using over-the-counter medicine you should tell your doctor, clinic or the pharmacist as other medicines, including those purchased over-the-counter, may interact with DOACs. This is also the case if you are considering taking herbal remedies and before stopping any existing ones.

It is important to avoid taking any other medicines that may increase your risk of bleeding, such as aspirin or ibuprofen unless prescribed by a doctor for you. If you need a pain relief medication, try paracetamol first. If that's not enough, you can take codeine for stronger pain relief.

Tell all healthcare professionals treating you that you are taking a DOAC. This includes anyone who prescribes you medication or carries out a procedure, for example, your dentist.

**It is a good idea to carry an up-to-date list of all your medicines.**

### **Does a DOAC affect pregnancy or breastfeeding?**

DOAC medication is not recommended during pregnancy. Women who are taking a DOAC should discuss plans for future pregnancy with their doctor before they conceive. If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, urgently seek advice from your doctor or clinic. Do not stop taking the medication unless advised by your doctor.

Breastfeeding is not recommended while taking a DOAC. Alternative anticoagulants can be used when you are breastfeeding.

### **Can I drink alcohol whilst taking a DOAC?**

DOACs do not interact with alcohol however, you should always consume alcohol in moderation and stay within the recommended guideline of drinking no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, spread across three days or more.

### **Is there a reversal agent to stop me from bleeding if necessary?**

Yes, in the rare event of serious bleeding, there are effective treatments available. While only some DOACs have a specifically licensed, fast-acting reversal agent, hospitals are well-equipped to respond. In emergencies, doctors can use proven therapies to quickly reverse the effects of a DOAC or significantly reduce bleeding.

### **Carrying a medical identification card**

It is advisable to carry some sort of identification so that in the event of an accident, if you were unable to speak, information about your medication could be easily accessed by the medical response team.

Some DOAC manufacturers provide an 'alert card' and/or have developed a smartphone app which can help remind you to take your medication.

## **DOAC Checklist**

### **Please remember – you should:**

- Report signs of bleeding and bruising,
- Have annual blood tests to check your kidney function,
- Take your DOAC with a glass of water as prescribed. Rivaroxaban should be taken with food,
- Take the dose prescribed,
- Eat a normal healthy diet,
- Carry your anticoagulant alert card with you,
- Give your alert card to your pharmacist/dentist/nurse at each visit,
- Attend all medical review appointments.

### **Please remember – you should NOT:**

- Take aspirin, ibuprofen or medicines containing aspirin unless prescribed by your doctor,
- Miss a dose of DOAC unless advised by your doctor,
- Take an extra dose of DOAC,
- Run out of tablets.

**This leaflet is for general information only and is not a substitute for medical advice.**

Leaflet produced with support from the following references:

Thrombosis UK – Patient Information and Support – Direct Oral Anticoagulation Therapy  
King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust - Apixaban for the treatment of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE)

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust - Apixaban (Eliquis) for stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation

[Alcohol advice - NHS](#)

## **How to contact us**

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