

Should I Monitor My Coumadin at Home?

Plain Language Summary:

Certain medical problems may increase your risk for developing a blood clot. A blood clot forms when parts of your blood get stuck together, typically in your leg or your heart. If that clot moves, it can cause problems. If it moves to your lungs, it can cause pain, or make it hard for you to breathe. This is called a *pulmonary embolism*. If the clot moves to your brain, it can affect you in many ways, but it often can make you weak or numb. This is called a *stroke*.

To prevent these problems, your doctor may ask you to take coumadin. Coumadin is a medicine that keeps your blood thin and prevents blood clots. However, coumadin can also increase your chance of bleeding. For many years, doctors have limited this risk by measuring their patients' blood thickness in the clinic. Recently, new devices have been made that allow patients to monitor their blood from home. Each person's situation is different, but this may be a good option for you to consider

What are the benefits? If you test your blood at home, you are less likely to die than if you than test in the clinic. You are also less likely to have a blood clot, stroke, or pulmonary embolism if you test at home. No matter how you test, it is unlikely that you will have any of these problems. However, testing at home will make it even less likely. Your chance of bleeding is also small, and is the same whether you test at home or in the clinic.

Another benefit of testing at home is that you will not need to come into the clinic every month. For many people, this makes their lives less stressful, and makes them happier.

What are the drawbacks? You will need to check your blood more frequently. People who check their blood at home test every 1 to 2 weeks. Another drawback is that the devices cost about \$1,000, and some insurance companies will not pay for them.

Are these devices right for me? In order to check your blood at home, you must be able to see clearly. You also cannot have difficulty using your hands. Finally, you will need to pass a test showing that you can use the machine correctly. If you can do these three things, you may be able to test your blood at home.

Summary. Checking your blood at home may make you healthier and make your life easier. If you are interested in this, talk to your doctor. Your doctor will work with you to figure out the best plan to meet your needs.

Additional Resources:

Information about Home INR Testing:

<http://labtestsonline.org/understanding/analytes/pt/tab/faq>

Patient's Guide to Blood Thinners:

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/btpills.htm>

PubMed Health:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0000634/>

Cleveland Clinic: http://my.clevelandclinic.org/drugs/coumadin/hic_understanding_coumadin.aspx

What is Atrial Fibrillation?

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/af/>

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Coumadin

INR

Thromboembolism

Atrial Fibrillation

Home Testing

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.