

Dabigatran (Pradaxa): *What you need to know and do*

What is dabigatran?

Dabigatran (Pradaxa) is an anticoagulant [an-tee-coh-AG-yoo-lehnt]. Anticoagulants are sometimes called “blood thinners.” They don’t really thin the blood. Instead, they:

- Stop the action of a certain protein your body needs to make blood clots
- Stop new clots from forming
- Keep blood clots from getting bigger, so your body can dissolve them over time

Dabigatran cannot break up clots you already have.

Why do I need it?

Dabigatran is typically used to treat:

- **Atrial fibrillation (afib) treatment.** Afib [AY-fibb] is an abnormal heart rhythm that can cause blood clots to form in the heart. By preventing blood clots from forming, dabigatran can help prevent a stroke.
- **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism treatment.** DVT is a blood clot that forms in the leg. It can break loose and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs where it can block an artery. A blocked lung artery is called a pulmonary embolism. Dabigatran can help prevent clots from forming or growing and stop pieces of the clot from breaking loose while the body is healing.
- **Blood clot prevention.** People who have hip or knee replacement surgery also use dabigatran to prevent blood clots from forming in the legs.

When and how should I take it?

Dabigatran is generally taken twice a day. **Swallow the pill whole, without crushing it.** Never open a capsule and sprinkle it on food.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

If you forget to take a dose of dabigatran, **do NOT double the dose** (do NOT take twice as much the next time). Instead, follow these guidelines:

- If it is *less than 6 hours* until your next dose, **skip the pill you missed** and continue your regular schedule.
- If it is *more than 6 hours* until your next dose, **take the pill you missed** and continue your regular schedule.

Does dabigatran interact with other medicines?

Dabigatran interacts with some medicines, sometimes by increasing your bleeding risk. **Always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting any new medicine or herbal supplement.** Medicines that interact with dabigatran include:

- Aspirin
- NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, Motrin, Advil, Aleve, etc.)
- Amiodarone (Pacerone)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- Prasugrel (Effient)
- Quinidine
- Rifampin
- St. John’s wort
- Ticagrelor (Brilinta)
- Verapamil

Does dabigatran have risks?

As with any medicine, dabigatran has some risks and side effects:

- **It can increase your risk of bleeding.** For information on how to lower your risk, signs to watch for, and what to do if bleeding occurs, [see page 2](#).
- **It can cause stomach upset**, including ulcers and heartburn. If dabigatran bothers your stomach, take it with food. If that doesn’t help, talk to your doctor.



When should I get medical help?

Call your doctor or anticoagulation clinic if:

- You start, stop, or change the dose of any of the medicines listed on [the previous page](#)
- You fall and hurt yourself, especially if you hit your head
- You're told that your kidneys don't work properly
- You see any of these **signs of increased bleeding**:
 - Bruising more than normal
 - Abnormal bleeding from your mouth, nose, or gums
 - Pink, red, or dark brown urine
 - Minor bleeding or bright red blood in your stool
 - Increased menstrual bleeding

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you notice any of these:

- A very bad headache and stiff neck that comes on suddenly
- Bowel movements that are bloody, dark red, black, tarry, smelly, or loose
- Sudden dizziness, faintness, or weakness
- Sudden pain in a joint (like an ankle, knee, wrist, elbow, shoulder, or hip)
- Cloudy vision that comes on suddenly
- Coldness or numbness in your arm or leg
- Sudden chest pain
- Trouble talking or moving one side of your body

How does dabigatran compare to warfarin (Coumadin)?

Studies show that dabigatran is as effective as warfarin in treating certain conditions.

- **Advantages.** Dabigatran has fewer medicine interactions than warfarin, it doesn't interact with food, and it doesn't require frequent blood tests.
- **Disadvantages.** Dabigatran is available only as the brand-name drug Pradaxa. It can be more expensive because there is no generic option available.

Is it safe during pregnancy? Dabigatran has not been fully studied in pregnancy, so there may be risks to your baby. If you're pregnant or plan to be, talk to your doctor before starting dabigatran.

How do I store it? Store dabigatran in its original bottle, NOT in a pill box. Keep the bottle in a cool, dry place, out of the reach of children. Dabigatran must be used within 30 days after opening the bottle. After 30 days, safely get rid of any unused dabigatran.

Who should NOT take dabigatran?

Patients who are allergic to dabigatran, who have bleeding problems, or who have poor kidney function should not take dabigatran. If you have any of these conditions and you are taking dabigatran, tell your healthcare provider right away.

How can I help prevent bleeding?

To reduce your risk of heavy bleeding:

- **Check with your doctor before doing any activity where you risk serious injury, bruising, or bleeding.** Examples include contact sports, extreme sports, or work that puts you on a ladder or around sharp tools.
- **Tell your doctor or dentist that you are taking dabigatran at least 1 week (7 days) before having any dental or surgical procedure.**

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