

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

What is dabigatran? Why do I need it?

Dabigatran (Pradaxa) is a medication that helps prevent blood clots. It is prescribed for people with **atrial fibrillation (afib)** — an abnormal heart rhythm that can cause blood clots to form in the heart. If a blood clot moves from the heart to your brain, it can cause a stroke. By preventing blood clots, dabigatran can also help prevent a stroke.

How does it work?

Dabigatran is an **anticoagulant**. Anticoagulants are sometimes called “blood thinners,” but they don’t actually thin your blood. They also do not break up existing clots. Instead, anticoagulants such as dabigatran and warfarin (Coumadin) prevent new clots from forming. They can also keep existing clots from getting bigger, so your body can dissolve them over time.

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



Dabigatran can prevent blood clots, so it can help prevent a stroke.

Does dabigatran have risks?

As with any medication, dabigatran poses some risks and side effects:

- **It can increase your risk of bleeding.** See page 2 for information on how to lower your risk, signs to watch for, and what to do if bleeding occurs.
- **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.
- **An increased risk of heart attack may exist** with dabigatran. Talk to your doctor to learn more.

Does dabigatran interact with other medications?

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

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| – amiodarone (Pacerone) | – prasugrel (Effient) |
| – aspirin | – quinidine |
| – clopidogrel (Plavix) | – rifampin |
| – NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, Motrin, Advil, Aleve, etc.) | – St. John’s wort |
| | – verapamil |

How can I help prevent bleeding?

Dabigatran can increase your risk of excessive bleeding. To help reduce this risk:

- **Check with your doctor before doing any activity where you risk being hurt.** Examples include contact sports, extreme sports, or work that puts you on a ladder or around sharp tools. When you're taking dabigatran, any major injury could cause serious bruising or bleeding.
- **Make sure your doctor or dentist knows you are on dabigatran, at least a week before any dental or surgical procedure.** You may need to stop taking it before having a procedure.

Storing and using dabigatran

- **Store dabigatran in its original bottle** — do NOT use a pill box. Keep the bottle in a cool, dry place, out of the reach of children.
- **Dabigatran has an "expiration date."** After you open the bottle, use the medication **within 30 days**. After 30 days, dispose of any unused dabigatran.

Other questions about dabigatran

Who should NOT take it? Patients who are allergic to dabigatran, who have bleeding problems, or who have impaired kidney function should not take dabigatran. If you have any of these conditions and you are taking dabigatran, tell your doctor right away.

How does it compare to Coumadin (warfarin)?

For some conditions, dabigatran is as effective as warfarin, with some advantages and disadvantages.

- **Advantages.** Dabigatran does not have many of the medication interactions caused by 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** — there is no generic option. Also, there is no antidote to reverse its action, so a sudden injury or surgery could cause excessive bleeding.

Is it safe in pregnancy? It 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.

When should I get medical help?

Call the doctor or anticoagulation clinic if:

- You start, stop, or change the dose of any of the medications listed on page one
- 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 nose or gums
 - Pink, red, or dark brown urine
 - Minor bleeding or bright red blood from your bowel
 - 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 come 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 trouble moving one side of your body