

# YOUR GUIDE TO Novel Oral Anticoagulants (NOAC)

## What is a NOAC?

NOACs help to prevent harmful blood clots from forming in your blood vessels by affecting the way in which clotting occurs. The four NOACs available are apixaban (Eliquis), dabigatran (Pradaxa), edoxaban (Savaysa) and rivaroxaban (Xarelto). These have slight differences in the way they are taken. It is important that you know which NOAC you have been prescribed and the information that comes with it.

## Why do I need a NOAC?

A NOAC may be prescribed for you for one of the following reasons:

### 1. Prevention of stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation (AF)

AF is an irregular heartbeat which can increase the risk of blood clots forming in the heart. A blood clot may then travel to the brain or other parts of the body. This may lead to serious health problems such as stroke. NOACs lower your chance of having a stroke by helping to prevent blood clots forming.

### 2. Prevention of blood clots in patients who have had recent hip or knee replacement

Blood clots may occur in people who are not physically mobile. People who have had a hip or knee replacement may need an anticoagulant to prevent blood clots until they are able to move around.

### 3. Treatment of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and prevention of recurrent DVT

DVT is a blood clot in one of the deep veins in your body, usually in your leg. Continuing treatment in people with a history of blood clots may be required to prevent further blood clots.

### 4. Treatment of pulmonary embolism (PE) and prevention of recurrent PE

PE is a blockage in blood flow when a blood clot from a vein breaks off and travels to the lungs. Continuing treatment in people with a history of blood clots may be required to prevent further blood clots.

## Will my blood be monitored during treatment?

Unlike warfarin, NOACs do not need regular blood tests. However, you may need a blood test to check your kidney function, liver function and a full blood count before starting treatment and they may be repeated yearly.

## Is bleeding a risk with NOACs?

As with all anticoagulants, bleeding is a possibility. It is important that you take your medication exactly as prescribed, avoid injuries that may result in bleeding, notify your doctor before dental or medical/surgical procedures, avoid heavy or binge drinking of alcohol, and consult a doctor before taking any new medications.

### Symptoms of bleeding include:

- Unexpected new pain, swelling or discomfort
- Severe headache, dizziness or weakness
- Unusual bruising, nosebleeds, bleeding of gums, cuts that take a long time to stop bleeding
- Menstrual flow or vaginal bleeding that is heavier than normal
- Blood in your urine, which may be pink or brown
- Red or black stools
- Coughing up blood, or vomiting blood or material that looks like coffee grounds

***If you have any symptoms of bleeding, tell your doctor or visit your nearest hospital emergency department immediately.***

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## **What do I do if I need dental or medical/surgical treatment?**

Bleeding from medical and dental procedures may be increased if you are taking a NOAC. With simple dental procedures and minor skin surgery, you may not need to stop taking your NOAC. Other procedures, such as endoscopy may require specialist advice. Your doctor will tell you what you need to do.

Tell your doctor or dentist that you are taking a NOAC before any planned procedure including operations in hospital, minor procedures at a surgery center, and some dental procedures. Your NOAC therapy will be considered during the planning of your operation or procedure.

*Do not stop taking your NOAC unless told by your doctor.*

## **WHAT IS BASIC CARDIOVASCULAR TESTING?**

There are some basic cardiology diagnostic tests that your doctor may run depending upon your symptoms and concerns. These tests provide baseline information to begin determining the cause of any problems you may be experiencing. Most people think that the word “cardiovascular” refers to the heart only. However, it is a term used to describe any route the blood travels as it circulates through the body. Therefore, you could even be referred for basic cardiovascular testing if you have pain in your legs or elevated blood pressure. Some tests may be ordered that seem unrelated to your concerns. Remember we are checking to be sure that your heart is stable and that there aren't any underlying severe causes for your symptoms.

## **HOW DO I PREPARE FOR MY TESTS?**

Basic cardiac tests require little preparation. It is recommended that you wear comfortable, two-piece clothing, and bring or wear walking shoes. You will be asked to change into a gown for most tests. Since some bloodwork requires fasting, it may be necessary for you to fast. Also be prepared to be at our office for several hours in case multiple tests need to be performed the same day. You may wish to bring a snack.

## **WHAT IS AN EKG OR ECG?**

Electrocardiography is a technique used to record the electrical signals that control the rhythm of your heartbeat. An electrocardiogram is a test that uses this technology. This test is also called an EKG or ECG.

An EKG can detect things like current and past heart attacks, blockages, a thick heart wall, certain electrolyte imbalances, and even changes that have been brought on by some medications that you are taking or have taken in the past. The EKG is painless. You will have to disrobe and several electrodes will be placed on your chest. These electrodes will have to stick to your skin, so it may be necessary to shave a few small areas of your chest. You will lie down if possible for a few minutes while the test is recorded on graph paper.

## **WHAT IS A TREADMILL TEST?**

The treadmill is an exercise test used to evaluate your heart function along with your pulse and blood pressure responses to activity. The physician may use the test to determine if current medications are working correctly, if you need further testing for blockages, or how your heart responds to increased activity.

You will have to remove your shirt for the test, and a gown will be provided. Since several electrodes will be placed on your chest, it may be necessary to shave a few small areas in order for the electrodes to stick. You will also have an electrode base strapped to your waist with a belt. These tools will help us to monitor your heart as you walk on the treadmill. The treadmill will start off at a minimal speed with a slight incline. It will then increase speed and incline every three minutes. A technician will inform you of all changes in speed and inclines and will take your blood pressure several times during and after the test. It is recommended that you wear comfortable shoes when walking on the treadmill.

## **WHAT IS A HOLTER MONITOR?**

The Holter monitor records electrical signals of the heart just like an EKG, but it does so over a 24-hour period. This test will monitor your heart rhythm during regular daily activities to see how your heart responds to activity, rest and/or medication changes.

This monitor is about the size of your hand and can be strapped to a belt loop or shoulder strap. The monitor has seven electrodes that will be placed on your chest. These electrodes will have to be secured to your skin with tape, so it may be necessary to shave a few small areas of your chest. You will not be able to shower or bathe during the 24-hour period that the monitor is being worn. The monitor must be returned as soon as possible for the physician to evaluate the rhythms recorded on it. You will be given further instructions at the time of the placement of this monitor.

## **IS A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION NECESSARY?**

Before you see the physician you will be weighed, and your blood pressure and pulse will be noted. We will also discuss all of your current medications with you and make an up-to-date record of the discussion. At this time, you should tell the nurse about any symptoms or concerns that you have. It is very important that you give a complete and accurate medical history to help us diagnose and treat your condition. Please bring copies of any tests that were ordered by another physician.

## **WHY DO I NEED BLOODWORK?**

Bloodwork is a very important part of diagnosing and monitoring certain medical problems. Blood results can help the physician determine which organs in your body may need treatment, or if levels in your blood need medication to be regulated. It is very important that you understand which blood tests are being done and what those results tell the physician.

Blood tests have to be specifically ordered according to what the physician is looking for; therefore, we will only get results of the specific tests that are ordered. If there is a certain condition you are concerned about, please discuss this with your physician/nurse practitioner before your blood is drawn so that appropriate bloodwork can be ordered to address your concerns.

It is not necessary to fast for all bloodwork. Please ask if the bloodwork ordered for you requires that you fast.