



National Blood Clot Alliance  
**Stop The Clot®**

# Living Your Best Life While Taking Blood Thinners

## DON'T LET NUISANCE BLEEDING WORRY YOU

### INTRODUCTION

Each year, about 2 to 3 million people in the United States will need to take a blood thinning medication. The reasons for using blood thinning medications vary from person to person, but one thing is common to all people who take them: Blood thinners are a lifesaving medication, but bleeding risks must be effectively managed. Fortunately, there are ways to avoid and quickly stop superficial or nuisance bleeding.

### BLOOD THINNER MEDICATIONS SAVE LIVES

Blood thinning medications come in two forms – a pill that is taken by mouth, or by an injection of the medication. Both types of blood thinning medications affect the body's ability to make clots. Blood thinners can stop clots from forming, slow down the formation of clots, stop clots from getting bigger, or prevent clots that have already formed from travelling to other parts of the body.



Blood clots do play an important role in sealing up wounds when we cut ourselves or suffer other injuries, but when blood clots form in the blood stream, they can be very dangerous to a person's health. The most common reasons for a healthcare provider to prescribe a blood thinning medication include:

- A person has an irregular heartbeat and is at risk for developing a clot that can cause stroke
- A person has a blood clot in their leg that can travel to the lung and prevent breathing
- A person has a blood clot in their lung that can prevent breathing
- A person had a serious injury or is having surgery, which can cause blood clots to form in the legs or lungs
- A person had a heart attack and is at risk to develop a clot in the heart that can travel to other parts of the body
- A person has a mechanical heart valve and is at risk to develop a clot in the heart that can travel to other parts of the body

### COMMON RISK: BLEEDING

Blood thinning medications do save lives, because they can treat or prevent dangerous blood clots. But, they also pose one possible and very serious side effect: Bleeding. Since blood thinners slow the clotting of blood, unwanted and sometimes dangerous bleeding can occur with the use of these medications.

A person who takes blood thinners should tell their healthcare provider about any bleeding or unusual bruising they experience, as well as any serious falls or a hard bump to the head. Although infrequent, bleeding caused by blood thinners can be very serious or life-threatening, like bleeding into the brain or stomach. Serious or life-threatening bleeding requires immediate medical attention.

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National Blood Clot Alliance's (NBCA) *Living Your Best Life While Taking Blood Thinners* series is basic, and is not intended to be thorough or replace medical advice. NBCA recommends that you consult your doctor about blood clot risk, prevention and treatment.

NBCA thanks its Medical and Scientific Advisory Board for its counsel in preparing this information.

[www.stoptheclot.org](http://www.stoptheclot.org)

## NUISANCE BLEEDING

Most of the time though, bleeding caused by blood thinners is not serious or life-threatening – like, for example, bleeding after a skin tear from yard work. Bleeding like this is less serious, but can still be troublesome and inconvenient, and it can seriously impact the quality of a person's day-to-day life.

For example, this type of bleeding, commonly referred to as nuisance bleeding, can include:

- Frequent nosebleeds, or nosebleeds that last longer than five minutes
- A small cut while shaving with a razor might bleed longer than normal, or for more than five minutes
- A minor cut, laceration, or skin tear that may bleed for a long time



While this type of nuisance bleeding is not life-threatening, more than half of all emergency room visits among people who take blood thinners are for nosebleeds and other types of nuisance bleeding caused by superficial wounds to the skin. Most importantly, nuisance bleeding is also frequently to blame when people stop taking their blood thinning medication as directed by their healthcare provider, which puts them at risk again for the development of dangerous or life-threatening blood clots that can result in hospitalization and added healthcare costs.

## HOW TO MANAGE NUISANCE BLEEDING

People who take blood thinners can still engage in most of the activities that they enjoy. They just need to take some extra precautions and, for example:

- Be cautious about activities, such as high-risk sports, that may result in injury, and always wear proper safety gear, for example, a bike helmet when cycling
- Wear protective gloves when working with tools, such as gardening shears or other sharp instruments
- Be careful when trimming hair or nails
- Use a soft toothbrush
- Wear shoes to avoid cuts on feet



No matter how cautious a person might be, accidents can happen, and nuisance bleeding might still occur. When it does, the first thing a person should do is apply light pressure to the site of bleeding, using a clean cloth or gauze pad, for example. If the bleeding continues for more than five minutes after pressure has been applied, there are several products, including special bandages, wound dressings, gels, and powders that can be used to help stop nuisance bleeding more quickly.

Special bandages or wound dressings, like BloodStop® and the QuickClot® clotting sponge, are applied to superficial wounds to help control bleeding until medical attention can be provided, or to help stop bleeding more quickly. Also, there are products like Celex™ that form a protective gel cover over wounds to stop bleeding. There are also powders, like WoundSeal®, that can be poured onto the skin or site of superficial bleeding to quickly form an instant scab to stop bleeding in just a few seconds. WoundSeal® can also be used with a special applicator to stop nose bleeds. Products like these are available without a prescription and can be found online or at most local pharmacies. They do not depend on or interfere with the blood's natural clotting mechanism to be effective, so they can be used safely by people who are taking blood thinning medications.

## CONCLUSION

Blood thinning medications save lives. People who take these medications can avoid or reduce bleeding risks by taking their blood thinning medication as directed by their doctor, and, when taking the oral blood thinning medication warfarin, by having their blood monitored regularly. People who take blood thinners should report any bleeding or unusual bruising to their healthcare provider. Some bleeding can be life-threatening and requires immediate medical attention. Some bleeding is superficial and not life-threatening, but can still be a nuisance. When nuisance bleeding does occur, over-the-counter products can help stop bleeding quickly and safely.

To learn more about the prevention and treatment of blood clots, and the safe use of blood thinner medications, contact the National Blood Clot Alliance at **877-4-NO-CLOT** or **[www.stopthecлот.org](http://www.stopthecлот.org)**.



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This educational information is made possible by a grant from BIOLIFE®, the makers of WoundSeal®

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