



## ANTICOAGULANTS (BLOOD THINNERS)

### ■ WHAT ARE ANTICOAGULANTS?

You can understand the purpose of anticoagulants by looking at the root words of the term. Anti = counter or against; coagulant = thicken or clot. Some generic or brand names of anticoagulants include:

- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Acetylsalicylic acid (better known as aspirin)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)

### ■ WHAT ARE THEY USED FOR?

Anticoagulants are used to reduce the risk of blood clots that could lead to a stroke and other medical conditions.

### ■ HOW DO THEY WORK?

Anticoagulants are often called blood thinners, although they don't actually thin the blood. Rather, they help prevent clots from forming in your blood. These medications treat conditions related to atherosclerosis, or arteries blocked by plaque. Plaque buildup can lead to a blood clot. A blood clot in the coronary arteries (which carry blood to the heart muscle) can cause angina (chest pain). A clot or blockage in the coronary arteries is called coronary artery disease (CAD) and could lead to a heart attack.

A blood clot in the carotid arteries (in your neck) can travel to the brain and cause a stroke. A blood clot in the vessels in the arms or legs, called peripheral vascular disease (PVD), can cause pain.

Some medications such as aspirin decrease the stickiness of the blood. This can also reduce the likelihood of blood clots forming.