

# How do I prevent a stroke if I have atrial fibrillation?

## Who is this handout for?

This handout is for adults who have been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, or “afib.”

## Am I at risk for a stroke?

Yes. People with afib are about 5 times more likely to have a stroke than people who do not have afib. However not everyone with afib will have a stroke. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about what *your* risk of stroke is.

## How can I help prevent a stroke?

There are lifestyle choices you can make to help reduce your risk of having a stroke. These choices include not smoking, maintaining a healthy diet, managing your weight, exercising, and taking any medications your doctor or healthcare provider prescribes for your afib, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

## Should I take medicine to prevent a stroke?

*Maybe.* The decision to take a medicine to prevent stroke depends on your risk of having a stroke and your risk of bleeding from a medicine. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about *your* specific risks.

There are two main types of medicines to prevent stroke. **Warfarin (Coumadin)** is a medicine that has been used for decades to prevent stroke in people with afib. Newer medicines, such as **apixaban (Eliquis) or rivaroxaban (Xarelto)** have also been shown in research studies to reduce strokes in people with afib.

## Where can I find more information?

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider any specific questions you have. If you are interested in learning more on your own, below are some trustworthy resources.

Format	Description	How do I get this?
Booklet	<b><i>Blood Thinner Pills: Your Guide to Using Them Safely</i></b> educates people about blood thinners. It also includes tips on diet, medicines and foods to avoid, and when to seek help.	<a href="http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/diagnosis-treatment/treatments/btpills/btpills.pdf">http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/diagnosis-treatment/treatments/btpills/btpills.pdf</a>
Video	<b><i>Staying Active and Healthy with Blood Thinners</i></b> is a 10-minute <a href="#">video</a> that shows how small changes in daily routines can help people take blood thinners safely.	<a href="http://www.healthcare411.ahrq.gov/videocast.aspx?id=555">http://www.healthcare411.ahrq.gov/videocast.aspx?id=555</a>
Interactive booklet	<b><i>The Afib Five</i></b> is an <a href="#">interactive, online booklet</a> that discusses five steps to living healthy with afib.	<a href="http://www.myvirtualpaper.com/doc/aha-publications/atrial-fibrillation--your-healthiest-life/2012092701/#0">http://www.myvirtualpaper.com/doc/aha-publications/atrial-fibrillation--your-healthiest-life/2012092701/#0</a>

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### Factors to consider when choosing a blood thinner

Factor	Warfarin (Coumadin)	Apixaban (Eliquis) or Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)
<b>Blood Tests Required</b>	More frequent	Less frequent
<b>Risk of Bleeding</b>	Similar Risks	Similar Risks
<b>Stopping Bleeding</b>	Antidote Available	No antidote, but in the hospital there are medicines used to help stop bleeding
<b>Medication Cost</b>	Generic	Brand name only
<b>Medication Interactions</b>	Many interactions	Many interactions
<b>Food Interactions</b>	Many interactions	Few interactions
<b>Kidney Issues</b>	No issues for most patients	May not be able to take if you have kidney problems
<b>Heart Valve Replacement</b>	Preferred if you have a "mechanical" heart valve	Not tested for people with a "mechanical" heart valve
<b>Consistency</b>	Long acting medication that takes several days to wear off	Missing even 1 dose may make the medicine ineffective