



HEALTH AWARENESS

Blood Thinners: What You Need To Know

(NAPSA)—Retired Army officer Frank Simons, 73, of Rochester, Ind., stays active and enjoys traveling the country, despite implantation of a mechanical heart valve in 1997 due to irregular heart rhythms. Every day he takes Coumadin® (an anticoagulant, or blood-thinning medication) to prevent blood clots that can be caused by the valve.

Simons's travel plans used to revolve around frequent physician visits to test his blood to ensure he was taking the correct dosage. Recently, his doctor informed him that he was eligible for a self-testing device that would enable him to test whenever it's convenient for him—on the road or at home.

Approximately four million people in the United States use blood-thinning medications such as warfarin or Coumadin. The wrong dosage can cause complications such as bleeding or stroke. Chris Ann DiPaola, R.N., Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, N.H., answers frequently asked questions about anticoagulation therapy and self-testing as an option for monitoring medication.

Q. Who needs blood-thinning medication?

A. Patients who are at risk for certain conditions, such as strokes or heart attacks, need blood-thinning medication. Patients with conditions such as atrial fibrillation, pulmonary embolism or deep vein thrombosis, or who have a mechanical heart valve, are often on anticoagulation therapy to prevent blood clots.

Q. What side effects may occur with anticoagulation?

A. Internal bleeding is a serious side effect. However, side effects are unusual if medication



Chris DiPaola, RN, talks about self-testing devices that may benefit some patients on blood thinners.

is used as instructed, dosage is closely monitored and your clinician is notified of any changes in diet or lifestyle. Studies have shown that complications, such as a stroke or internal bleeding, are reduced by 50 to 80 percent when patients are monitored frequently.

Q. How do self-monitoring devices work?

A. Patients monitor their medication by placing a drop of blood on a small, disposable test card. The device then automatically reads the card and, within minutes, indicates whether patients are within their prescribed range. Patients then report the result to their doctor, who determines if dosage adjustments are necessary.

Q. Am I eligible for self-testing?

A. The best candidates for self-testing are patients who find it difficult to maintain regularly scheduled clinic visits. Patients “on the go” or requiring frequent blood tests can also benefit from self-testing. The ITC ProTime Microcoagulation System is one such self-test device available to patients.

For more information on anticoagulation therapy visit www.hometestprogram.com.