



Bridge Therapy

What is bridge therapy?

Bridge therapy is the process of changing from one anticoagulant or blood thinning medicine to another.

How does bridge therapy work?

When you first start taking blood thinners in the hospital, you usually begin with a medicine called heparin because heparin begins to work quickly. It is given through an IV into your vein or by injection (shot) into your stomach. You will then start taking another blood thinner called warfarin (Coumadin[®]). Heparin and warfarin may be taken together. Warfarin is a pill that takes 2-3 days to begin to work. Once your warfarin reaches a normal or therapeutic level (INR level between 2.0 and 3.0), you will stop taking the heparin.

Can I go home during bridge therapy?

YES. Even though your warfarin level (INR) has not reached the normal or therapeutic range, your healthcare team has decided that you are well enough to go home. With an INR below 2.0 it is not safe to stop taking heparin.

You will need to take injections (shots) of heparin at home. You will need to give yourself the injections (shots) or have a family member or loved one give you the injections (shots) instead.

What do I need to know about bridge therapy at home?

- There are three types of heparin injections (shots):
 - enoxaparin sodium (Lovenox[®])
 - dalteparin (Fragmin[®])
 - fondaparinux sodium (Arixtra[®]).

You will be sent home with a prescription for one these medicines.

- Your nurse will teach you how to give the injection (shot) to yourself. Your nurse will also teach a family member or loved one how to give you the injection if you cannot give it to yourself or if you would like for someone else to know how as well.
- You will also be taking warfarin (Coumadin[®]) at night. Remember...bridge therapy is the process of changing from heparin to warfarin. You will be taking both the heparin injection (shot) and the warfarin while you are at home until your doctor tells you to stop. You will be given EXACT instructions about starting and taking these two medicines. Follow these instructions.

When and where do I go for blood tests?

It is important to have your blood tested often while you are taking blood thinners in order to make sure that you are taking the correct amount of medication.

During bridge therapy, the results of a special blood test (called the INR) help your doctor decide when you can stop taking the heparin injections (shots). Your healthcare team will tell you when and where to go for your blood test after you



go home from the hospital. You will usually need to go within 1-2 days. If you are home and not sure about when or where to go for your blood test, call your doctor.

What do my blood test results mean?

Based on the results of your INR test, your doctor will tell you if it is safe for you to stop the injections (shots) of heparin and continue taking warfarin only. **DO NOT** stop taking the injections (shots) unless your doctor tells you to do so. If your INR level is below 2.0 you will need to continue the injections (shots). A lower INR number means “thicker” blood. Having an INR **BELOW** 2 means your blood is too “thick.” The thicker your blood, the higher the risk of forming blood clots. Once your INR level reaches 2.0, you will most likely be able to stop the injections (shots). You will still need to have regular INR tests to make sure that you are taking the proper amount of warfarin.

What side effects should I watch for?

Remember...you are taking two blood thinning medications so you may be at high risk for bleeding and bruising. You must be very careful and monitor closely for signs of bleeding such as:

- blood in your urine
- red or black “tarry” bowel movements
- vomiting or coughing up blood (looks like “coffee grounds”)
- heavy bleeding or bleeding easily
- major bruising or bruising easily