

Dabigatran Etxilate

This medicine is an anticoagulant, which belongs to the oral direct thrombin inhibitor class of drugs. It is used to 'thin the blood' so that clots (or thrombosis) will not occur. In contrast to Warfarin, which is a vitamin K antagonist type of drug that blocks the production of multiple clotting factors being produced in the liver, Dabigatran acts by specifically inhibiting thrombin, which is a final pathway of the clotting process in the blood, hence resulting in the blood clotting process being inhibited.

Dabigatran already has a licence for the prevention of venous thrombosis after orthopaedic surgery, in Europe. More recently, results for a large trial comparing Dabigatran to Warfarin for stroke prevention in Atrial Fibrillation (AF) have been published.

This trial compared Warfarin (INR 2-3) against 2 doses of Dabigatran, 110mg twice daily and 150mg twice daily. The trial (called RE-LY) found that Dabigatran 150mg was superior to Warfarin for stroke prevention, with similar rates of major bleeding – whilst Dabigatran 110mg had similar efficacy to Warfarin for stroke prevention, with 20% lower risk of major bleeding. Both Dabigatran arms had less intracranial bleeding rates compared to Warfarin treated patients.

The process for gaining regulatory approval and a licence for stroke prevention in AF are in progress. Pending official approval of the drug, there remains concern over 'off label' use of the drug, based on its availability of the 75mg and 110mg tablets for venous thrombosis prophylaxis.

Given the small risk of dyspepsia, take with food if it causes an upset stomach.

Dabigatran has a short half-life, which means that the drug levels (and thus, anticoagulant effect) would decline soon after a dose or more are missed. Thus, take a missed dose as soon as possible – however, if it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular schedule. You should not take a double dose or extra doses of Dabigatran.

The drug is excreted by the kidneys, so where your kidney function is impaired, your dose of Dabigatran would need to be reviewed.

The main side effects of the drug – given it is an anticoagulant – are bleeding problems.

In the trials, Dabigatran was associated with more gastrointestinal upsets (particularly dyspepsia) and gastrointestinal bleeding, as well as a small excess of heart attacks.

Author: Professor Gregory Y H Lip, Cardiologist
Endorsed by: Dr Matthew Fay, GP
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