

BLOOD THINNERS

PRACTICAL PEARLS FOR COMMON PROBLEMS

- **Asking about medications in your SAMPLE history is important**
- **Medications which “thin” the blood are commonly taken by older adults**
- **Minor mechanisms can result in devastating injuries to patients on these medications**

Anticoagulants (aka blood thinners) are a class of medications which intend to “thin” the blood by inhibiting one or more steps of the body’s clotting cascade. They are prescribed as a treatment or prevention for a variety of ailments, such as PE, DVT, atrial fibrillation, prosthetic heart valves, and more. When a traumatically injured patient is on one of these medications, a minor injury mechanism such as a simple ground level fall can result in catastrophic bleeding in any number of places such as the head, chest, abdomen, retroperitoneum, or extremity compartments. If the patient is bleeding externally, you will likely find that basic hemorrhage control is challenging, though the approach to management remains the same for patrollers.

Antiplatelet agents are a class of medications which inhibit platelet aggregation, a step which is necessary for effective blood clotting and thrombus formation. They are commonly prescribed for things like coronary artery disease, ischemic stroke, and after receiving stents for a heart attack. Many patients are often prescribed two antiplatelet agents at the same time (i.e. aspirin and Plavix), which in combination can also cause catastrophic bleeding from minor mechanisms and should therefore be treated as a full “blood thinner.”

Be sure to take a good SAMPLE history and expedite emergent transport for patients on anticoagulant or antiplatelet medications. If these patients come into the patrol room and are injured in any manner, they should not go back to skiing or sit around the resort - this patient needs to be evaluated in the emergency department. For example, even if a skier has a minor fall resulting in an extremity injury, remember that these patient’s can develop catastrophic intracranial hemorrhage *even if the patient did not hit his or her head.*

Some common medication names are listed below, though these lists are not exhaustive by any means. Memorizing these is probably not a great use of time because in general, simply asking “do you take any blood thinning medications?” will get you the information you are looking for.

Common anticoagulation medications:

- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Heparin
- Enoxaparin (Lovenox)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa)
- Apixaban (Eliquis)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)

Common antiplatelet medications:

- Aspirin
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- Ticagrelor (Brilinta)