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Eliquis (Apixaban)

A blood thinner for AFib and blood clots. How it works, how to take it and which bleeding signs need attention.

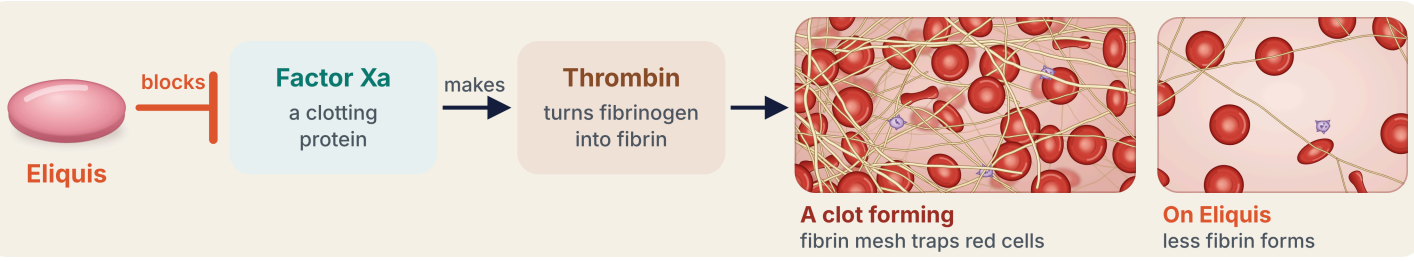
12 hours
is about how long half a dose takes to clear, so it's taken twice a day

31%
less major bleeding than warfarin in the ARISTOTLE trial of 18,201 people

58%
fewer bleeds inside the skull than warfarin in the same trial

HOW IT WORKS

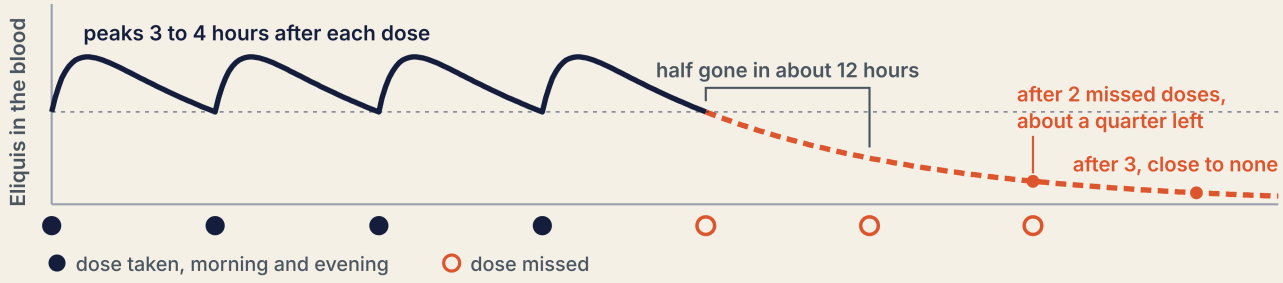
It blocks one step in building a clot



Eliquis (apixaban) prevents strokes in atrial fibrillation (AFib), treats clots in the legs (DVT) and lungs (PE) and helps keep them from coming back, and prevents clots after a hip or knee replacement. It needs no routine INR checks, and you don't have to limit vitamin K in your food. Warfarin is still the right drug for a mechanical heart valve or a moderate to severe rheumatic narrowing of the mitral valve.

WHY EVERY DOSE COUNTS

Protection fades within a day or two



Each dose peaks 3 to 4 hours after you take it, and about half is gone 12 hours later, so Eliquis is taken twice a day. Two missed doses bring the level down to about a quarter of normal, and three bring it close to none. For someone with AFib, the days off the drug are when the stroke risk is highest.

Every dose, every day

Take it twice a day and don't stop it on your own, even for a few days before a procedure. Ask your cardiologist first. A dental cleaning, for example, rarely needs any pause.

TAKING IT SAFELY

Your dose, bleeding signs and what to avoid

YOUR DOSE

set by your doctor

AFib	5 mg twice a day. The lower dose, 2.5 mg twice a day, is only for people who meet at least two of three criteria. They are age 80 or older, weight 60 kg (about 132 lb) or less, and a creatinine (a kidney blood test) of 1.5 mg/dL or higher. One alone isn't enough, and too low a dose protects less against stroke.
A new clot in a leg or lung	10 mg twice a day for the first 7 days, then 5 mg twice a day for at least 3 to 6 months, with no adjustment for the AFib rule. After 6 months, some people with ongoing risk stay on 2.5 mg twice a day to prevent another clot.
After hip or knee replacement	2.5 mg twice a day, starting 12 to 24 hours after surgery, for 12 days after a knee and 35 days after a hip.

COMMON BLEEDING

usually minor

Bruises, nosebleeds, gums	Easy bruising, nosebleeds, gums that bleed when you brush and small cuts that bleed longer are common. They reflect the drug working and are rarely a reason to stop it.

GET MEDICAL HELP RIGHT AWAY

Stomach or bowel	Black or bloody stools, vomiting blood, or vomit that looks like coffee grounds.
Urine or vaginal	Blood in the urine, or vaginal bleeding outside your usual pattern.
Head and stroke signs	Call 911 for a sudden severe headache, weakness or numbness, confusion or other stroke signs (face, arm, speech, balance, vision). On a blood thinner a stroke can be a clot or a bleed, and both need a brain scan right away. Report any fall or head injury.
Muscles and joints	A large bleed into a muscle or joint without an injury.

OTHER MEDICINES, ALCOHOL AND TESTS

Pain relievers	Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is preferred. Avoid ibuprofen, naproxen and prescription anti-inflammatories, which raise stomach bleeding risk. Ask your cardiologist first if you need one.
Aspirin and clopidogrel	Either one adds to the bleeding risk, and taking both with Eliquis roughly doubles major bleeding. Combine them only when your cardiologist prescribes it.
Drugs that change the level	Ketoconazole, itraconazole and ritonavir can raise it. Rifampin, carbamazepine, phenytoin and St. John's wort lower it and weaken protection. Report every new medicine and supplement.
Alcohol	Up to 1 drink a day for women and 2 for men is generally fine. Heavy drinking raises bleeding risk.
Blood tests	No INR checks. A kidney test and blood count once a year, plus liver tests now and then if you have liver disease.

BEFORE ANY PROCEDURE

Tell your doctor or dentist you take Eliquis. Cleanings, skin biopsies and cataract surgery rarely need a pause. A colonoscopy with polyp removal needs 24 to 48 hours off it, major surgery 48 hours, and a spinal or epidural at least 72 hours (36 on the low dose used after hip or knee surgery). No heparin shots are needed in between. After major surgery it usually restarts in 48 to 72 hours.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

damianrasch.com/eliquis-apixaban

For education only, and not a substitute for advice from your own physician. Sources include the ARISTOTLE trial (NEJM 2011), AMPLIFY and AMPLIFY-EXT (NEJM 2013), the ADVANCE trials, AUGUSTUS (NEJM 2019) and the 2023 ACC/AHA/ACCP/HRS and 2024 ESC atrial fibrillation guidelines.

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