

Doctor, I have finished 6 months of Xarelto® for my blood clot. Can I switch to aspirin now?

Continuing Xarelto® (rivaroxaban) will protect you from developing another blood clot better than taking aspirin. After 6 months, some people can switch to a lower dose of Xarelto®, which appears to work just as well as the standard dose. We should talk about whether that is a good plan for you.

What's the evidence?

Understanding the problem

Anticoagulants protect people who have deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE) from forming new blood clots while their body works on breaking down the old blood clots. How long people with DVT or PE should take an anticoagulant is not based on when the clot is gone. Instead, it is based on when the risk factor that caused the blood clot is gone.

For example, Alice develops a DVT one week after hip replacement surgery. She is treated with anticoagulants for 3 months, and then her doctor tells her she can stop taking them. Alice's risk factor for DVT was surgery. Her DVT is called "provoked".

For many people, the risk factor that caused the DVT or PE is either weak (e.g. travel) or unknown. This type of DVT or PE is called "unprovoked". These people remain at risk for forming new blood clots for the rest of their lives. To protect themselves from another clot, they may decide to take anticoagulants indefinitely.

Anticoagulants also have safety concerns because they increase the risk of bleeding.

For example, Sam has an ulcer in his stomach that is bleeding, but so slowly, he hasn't noticed it. But when Sam is diagnosed with a PE and starts taking anticoagulants, the bleeding from his ulcer increases and he vomits up blood.

Researchers are always looking for ways to protect people from blood clots while lowering the risk of bleeding. For this reason, the study described below was designed to find out if aspirin was just as good at preventing new blood clots as Xarelto®, but with a lower risk of bleeding.

The study

Who? The study included 3396 adults (average age 59; 57% male) who completed 6 to 12 months of standard dose Xarelto® for DVT or PE, and the risk factor that caused their DVT or PE was either weak or unknown.

What? The study compared 2 doses of Xarelto® (20 mg daily or 10 mg daily) with aspirin (100 mg daily).

Xarelto® (rivaroxaban)	vs	Aspirin
Xarelto®, 20 mg once a day (standard dose) Xarelto®, 10 mg once a day (low dose)		Aspirin, 100 mg once a day

What the researchers found

People who took low-dose Xarelto® did not have more new blood clots than people who continued standard dose Xarelto®.

Both doses of Xarelto® prevented more blood clots than aspirin.

People who took either dose of Xarelto® did not have more serious bleeding (e.g., requiring a blood transfusion) than people who took aspirin.

Summary of findings

Xarelto® vs aspirin in patients with DVT or PE who had completed 6 to 12 months of Xarelto®

Outcomes at 1 year	Rate of events with Xarelto®, 20 mg daily	Rate of events with Xarelto®, 10 mg daily	Rate of events with aspirin, 100 mg daily	Results
DVT	1 out of 100 people	1 out of 100 people	3 out of 100 people	About 2 fewer people out of 100 who took Xarelto® had a new DVT at 1 year.
PE	1 out of 100 people	1 out of 100 people	2 out of 100 people	About 1 less person out of 100 who took Xarelto® had a new PE at 1 year.
Serious bleeding	1 out of 100 people	1 out of 100 people	1 out of 100 people	No effect*

*Although the rates for the 2 groups look different, the differences were not statistically significant—this means that the difference could simply be due to chance rather than due to the different treatments.

This Evidence Summary is based on the following article:

Weitz JI, Lensing AWA, Prins MH, et al. **Rivaroxaban or Aspirin for Extended Treatment of Venous Thromboembolism**. *N Engl J Med*. 2017 Mar 30;376(13):1211-1222. PubMed (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28316279?dopt=Abstract>)

Published: Friday, May 11, 2018

Last Updated: Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Glossary

anticoagulant	medications that prevent blood clots from forming or travelling (aka blood thinner)
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deep vein thrombosis (DVT)	formation of a blood clot within a vein deep within the leg
DVT	formation of a blood clot within a vein deep within the leg
PE	blood clot(s) that cause obstruction of blood vessels within the lungs (pulmonary artery), after travelling from veins, most commonly within the leg or arm or pelvis
provoked	DVT or PE that is associated with (or thought to be caused by) a strong risk factor such as cancer or recent surgery
pulmonary embolism (PE)	blood clot(s) that cause obstruction of blood vessels within the lungs (pulmonary artery), after travelling from veins, most commonly within the leg or arm or pelvis
risk factor	characteristics that increase the chance that a person will develop a disease or condition or experience a bad outcome
ulcer	open sore

unprovoked

a DVT or PE that is unexplained or not associated with a strong risk factor (aka idiopathic VTE)