

Anticoagulants are given to reduce the risk of stroke in patients who have atrial fibrillation. These medications work by preventing clots from forming in the heart, breaking loose and travelling to the brain.

Since these medications inhibit blood clotting, they also increase the risk of bleeding that might occur with surgery. Because of this, patients are often asked to stop anticoagulation prior to their surgery. In doing so, the patient will be exposed to increased risk of stroke while off of these medications.

So what to do? First of all you should take stopping anticoagulation seriously. Very often the anticoagulation doesn't truly need to be held. Although there will be increased risk of operative bleeding, frequently this bleeding is easily controlled or falls into the category of nuisance rather than serious bleeding. For example, with almost all dental and dermatologic procedures anticoagulation can be safely continued uninterrupted. Similarly, with many endoscopic and general surgical procedures anticoagulation should be continued.

There are cases however, where it is simply not possible to safely continue uninterrupted anticoagulation. Spinal, neurosurgical, major abdominal and urological procedures fall into this category. In these cases there is an unavoidable increased risk of stroke while off of anticoagulation. This risk is based upon the patient's overall risk of stroke from atrial fibrillation, and the duration of time the anticoagulants are held.

So if your surgeon asks you to stop anticoagulation for a procedure, please refer them to our office. We will then ask them:

Is it possible to operate on the anticoagulation? If so, this is the ideal situation, and you should continue with the medication uninterrupted.

If it is not possible to be fully anticoagulated for the procedure, we will work with your surgeon to minimize time off of anticoagulants.

**However, it is important for you to realize that in stopping anticoagulation for any duration you are accepting an increased risk of stroke.**

We are happy to have a longer face-to-face conversation to discuss this further if you wish. Please call our office 650-652-8600 and schedule an appointment.