


# THE Beat

A publication of  
the North American  
Thrombosis Forum



NATF wishes you a happy  
holiday season!

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## Beyond Blood Thinners: What to Know About Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Blood Clots

After having a blood clot, some patients turn to complementary and alternative medicine, or CAM, to help with their recovery.

Complementary medicine refers to using holistic techniques, like yoga or tai chi, alongside standard medical treatment, while alternative medicine is used instead of standard treatment.

So what do we know about CAM after a blood clot? And which methods have been shown to be safe and effective in the research?

### **Meditation**

Stress has been [found](#) to increase the risk of blood clots, particularly in people who are already at a higher clot risk – which includes people who have already had a blood clot. If you've had a clot, learning stress management techniques may help reduce your risk of having another one.

For some people, meditation can be helpful in managing stress. Some [studies](#) have shown a lower clot risk in people who regularly practice meditation. The research has not been consistent, and the effect seems to be bigger for arterial clots (heart attacks and stroke) than for venous clots (clots in the deep veins). Still, meditation is a very low-risk activity, so there's no reason not to try it if you feel that it might be helpful for you. There are various types of meditation available, including silent meditation, chanting, and even breathwork (which uses alterations of breath patterns to induce a meditative state).



### **Yoga and Tai Chi**

Yoga and tai chi are sometimes referred to as "moving meditation." These forms of movement include a component of mindfulness ("being in the moment") and help release stress, which can have the same benefits as other types of meditation.

In addition, these techniques have the added benefit of physical movement. Lack of movement is one of the strongest risk factors for having a

blood clot, so additional movement could help to prevent another clot. Although there is little evidence that yoga or tai chi can reduce the risk of blood clots in general, these gentle forms of movement are typically very safe for people who are recovering from a blood clot.

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine technique, which involves inserting extremely tiny needles into the skin at specific points on the body. The goal is to alter the flow of energy in the body.

Currently, there is very little research investigating the effect of acupuncture on the risk of blood clots. One [study](#) did show that regular use of acupuncture led to a lower risk of stroke in people at higher risk (for stroke), but more research is needed to determine whether acupuncture is effective at preventing clots.

There are [studies](#) indicating that acupuncture is safe for people who are taking blood thinners, as long



as the appropriate needle size and depth are used. If you do choose to try acupuncture, make sure to choose a licensed and experienced practitioner – and always check with your anticoagulant prescriber first.









### Chiropractic Manipulation

Chiropractic manipulation generally involves quick movement of a segment of the spine. Because its practitioners have a doctoral-level degree, some people don't consider chiropractic care to be CAM, but rather a form of mainstream medical treatment. However, the National Center for Complementary and

Integrative Health does [classify](#) chiropractic manipulation as a form of CAM.

Overall, there's little research on blood clots and chiropractic manipulation. Some [studies](#) show that manipulation may help treat high blood pressure (which is a risk factor for clots), but other study findings have been contradictory. At this time, we simply don't have enough research to know whether chiropractic manipulation can help prevent clots, so it's best to avoid chiropractic manipulation of any area where you actively have a clot. For example, if you have a clot in a vein near the hip, then lower back manipulation may be unsafe, as it could break off a piece of the clot. There is also a small [risk](#) of chiropractic manipulation causing damage to an artery in the neck, leading to a blood clot that can cause a stroke. However, this is extremely rare.

**[\\*Looking for information about massage? See our Holiday Helpline on page 3.](#)**

Take Care in the Kitchen: Eating Safely on Anticoagulation			
Consume these spices and supplements in moderation if you take a blood thinner.			
 <p><b>Cayenne</b></p> <p>Contains salicylate, which is found in aspirin</p> <p>Can impact bleeding risk if consumed in large amounts</p>	 <p><b>Fish Oil</b></p> <p>Can impact bleeding risk if consumed in large amounts</p>	 <p><b>Garlic</b></p> <p>Can prolong bleeding time</p> <p>Should not be used 7-10 days before surgery</p>	 <p><b>Ginger</b></p> <p>Contains salicylate, which is found in aspirin</p> <p>Can impact bleeding risk if consumed in large amounts</p>
 <p><b>Grapefruit</b></p> <p>Can increase bleeding risk if you take warfarin</p>	 <p><b>Grapeseed oil</b></p> <p>A natural anticoagulant</p> <p>Can increase bleeding risk</p>	 <p><b>Tumeric</b></p> <p>Contains a derivative called curcumin, similar to coumarin</p> <p>Warfarin is derived from coumarin</p> <p>Can increase bleeding risk</p>	 <p><b>Vitamin K</b></p> <p>Eating too much vitamin K can increase the risk of blood clots if you take warfarin</p> <p>Vitamin K is found in leafy greens and other foods</p> <p>Aim to eat about the same amount of vitamin K each day if you're on warfarin</p>

## Herbs and Supplements

There are some herbs and supplements that can affect both clotting and bleeding, including [garlic](#), [ginkgo biloba](#), and [curcumin](#) (a compound found in turmeric), as well as [omega-3 fatty acids](#) (found in fish oil). These supplements, and others (**see chart on page 2**), can interact with blood thinners as well, either by making them too effective (increasing your risk of bleeding), or by preventing them from working effectively (putting you at risk for a clot).

## Common Blood Thinner Interactions with Drugs and Supplements

- **Aspirin** can increase the risk of bleeding and should be avoided. Instead use a pain reliever such as acetaminophen (like Tylenol®), unless otherwise directed by your doctor.
- **Cannabis or CBD products** can increase the risk of bleeding.

- **Ginkgo biloba** can increase the risk of bleeding.
- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs):** NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®), can raise the risk of bleeding, especially in the stomach. As with aspirin, NSAIDs should be avoided if you take a blood thinner.
- **St. John's Wort:** Large amounts can decrease the effectiveness of warfarin and increase the risk of bleeding.
- **Vitamin E**, when taken in large doses, can increase bleeding risk.

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**Always tell your anticoagulant prescriber about ALL of the medications, herbs, and supplements that you use.**

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## CAM and Blood Clots: The Bottom Line

We need a lot more research on most forms of CAM to know if they can help reduce the risk of clots. There's some evidence that meditation, yoga, and tai chi could be beneficial. Some herbs and supplements also appear to reduce clotting, but these can be dangerous when used alongside blood thinners.

If you're considering using any CAM technique, you should always speak with your medical team first to ensure that you're making a shared—and informed—decision.

## Holiday Helpline: Thrombosis Edition

### Answers to Your Commonly Asked Questions

Reviewed by  
Aaron Aday, MD, MS

**The 2023 holiday season is officially here!**  
**But alongside the holiday cheer,**  
**There are several questions that we hear**  
**At this time of year...**



Below you can find the answers to some recent questions submitted by patients. If you've had a blood clot and/or take blood thinners, this information can help you have a happy—and safe—holiday season!

**Q: Every Christmas, my sister gives me a gift card for a massage. However, I recently had a blood clot. Is it safe to get my massage this year?**

**A:** It's important to exercise caution when getting a massage after a clot. If you're taking blood thinners, you may bruise easily. Deep tissue massages should be avoided since they can

increase the risk of bleeding, but lighter pressure is okay. In addition, if the clot is still present in your leg, then it's best to avoid massage of the area until it's gone (which can take up to a few months). The [risk](#) is that the massage could break off a piece of the clot, which could then travel to your lungs. This can be extremely dangerous and even fatal.

**Q: I have to make a long trip to see my family for the holidays – a 5-hour plane ride followed by a 2-hour car ride. Does long-haul travel increase my risk for a blood clot?**

**A:** The risk of getting a blood clot from traveling is small, but some people have a higher risk, like those who are overweight, older, pregnant, have a history of blood clots, or have limited mobility.

It's unclear if long-distance air travel is any riskier than car or train travel, but [there are factors unique to airplanes](#) that can affect risk, like sitting in a tight seat and not being able to move around much. Your body takes in less oxygen when air pressure is lower, and some data also suggest that lower oxygen levels can trigger the body's clotting response. Finally, dehydration can increase the risk of a clot; drinking coffee or alcohol on a flight can fast-track dehydration. And if you tend to sleep on a long flight, then you likely aren't moving around or hydrating.

The good news is that there are several commonsense methods that



can help lower your risk, whether you're traveling by plane, train, or car:

- If flying, choose a bulkhead seat or see if your flight offers extra-legroom seating. If not, avoid putting a bag under the seat in front of you so you have more space for your legs and feet.
- Try to move around every 1-2 hours. Selecting an aisle seat on a plane or train can make it easier to get up and walk. In a car, try to stop every couple of hours so you can get out of the car and stretch your legs a bit.
- Avoid sleeping in awkward positions for long periods of time.
- Try not to cross your legs.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing.
- Drink lots of water and avoid alcohol, caffeine, and sedatives.

Experts recommend these commonsense measures for most people, but those at higher clot risk may need to wear compression stockings or talk to their clinician about taking medicine to prevent blood clots.

**Q: I'm on a blood thinner. Can I drink alcohol at upcoming holiday celebrations?**

**A:** If you're on a blood thinner, you should always consult with your doctor or pharmacist before consuming alcohol. There are a few considerations to note:

- Alcohol and blood thinners can independently raise the risk of



## Simple Exercises to Do In-Flight

### KNEE-TO-CHEST STRETCH

Slightly lean forward and slowly pull your knee into your chest. Hold for 15 seconds on each side.

### ANKLE CIRCLES

Raise your feet off the floor and circle them 5 times clockwise and counterclockwise.

### FOOT PUMPS AND CALF RAISES

Lift your toes as high as you can and hold for 10 seconds. Then, lower your toes and repeat the exercise with your heels — lift them for 10 seconds while keeping your toes on the floor.

### SHOULDER STRETCH

While seated, put your right hand on your left shoulder. Use your left hand to grasp your right elbow and pull down toward your left side. Hold this for 10-15 seconds and repeat on your left side.

**\*Repeat each exercise 5 times if possible.**



bleeding — so when the two are combined, your risk of bleeding may be increased further.

- Some blood thinners (like warfarin) have known interactions with alcohol, so drinking in moderation is key (which generally translates to no more than 1-2 drinks maximum in one sitting).
- Heavy alcohol consumption can lead to stomach irritation, which, when combined with the effects of blood thinners, could raise the risk of bleeding in your stomach, also known as gastrointestinal or GI bleeding.
- Alcohol-related falls can lead to serious bleeding, especially if you hit your head when you fall. Use caution when drinking alcohol and sit down if you're not feeling steady on your feet.

Do you like what you see in *The Beat* and find this information helpful?

**Please consider making a [donation](#) to NATF to further support blood clot education.**



Scan the QR code to access important website links





## A Heart-Healthy Holiday Recipe

Courtesy of the [American Heart Association](#)

### Apple Bread Pudding

Whole-grain bread, apples, and cinnamon make a sweet dessert that's healthy, too!

#### Ingredients

**Servings:** 4 **Serving Size:** one 3 x 4-inch piece

- Cooking spray
- 1 large egg
- 1 large egg white
- 1 cup fat-free milk
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar blend
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves or allspice
- 6 slices light, whole-grain bread, cubed
- 3 medium apples (cored, cut into 1/2-inch cubes)
- 1/2 cup of any one of the following: raisins, unsweetened dried cranberries, fresh or unsweetened dried blueberries, chopped walnuts, pecans, or almonds (optional)



#### Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Lightly spray a 9-inch square baking dish with cooking spray.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together the egg, egg white, milk, brown sugar blend, vanilla, cinnamon, and cloves.
4. Stir in the bread, apples, and raisins, cranberries, blueberries, and/or nuts.
5. Pour the mixture into the baking dish. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the bread cubes are golden brown.

## Upcoming Patient Events

### Support Group for Newly Diagnosed Patients

Hosted by Joelle Hochman, RRT,  
Chair of Patient Engagement &  
Education

We're pleased to offer a virtual support group experience specifically for patients who've recently had a blood clot.\*

December 21, 2023

January 18, 2024

February 15, 2024

**All meetings start at 7:00 PM EST**

If you're a longtime reader of *The Beat*, please help us spread the word about this support group! More information can be found on our website.



### NATF Support Group

This virtual support group is designed for patients at all stages of their blood clot journey. If you had your blood clot 20 days ago or 20 years ago, we welcome you to join us!

**Dates  
forthcoming  
for 2024!**

**All meetings start at 7:00 PM EST**

To register for these programs, please visit  
Patient Events on our website at  
<https://thrombosis.org/events/patients/>



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through education

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