DOACs are not directly affected by alcohol. However, we recommend that you do not exceed the safe limits of alcohol (14 units per week for men or women), as this can increase your risk of bleeding.

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Shortly after starting treatment, you may be asked to visit a cardiologist (heart specialist) or haematologist (blood specialist) at the hospital. This is to ensure that you are not experiencing any problems with your new medicine.

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We recommend that you carry an anticoagulation card with you at all times in case of emergency. If you do not already have a card, please ask your pharmacist for one.

Useful sources of information
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Direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs) for use in atrial fibrillation

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about anticoagulants that may be prescribed for you when you are diagnosed with atrial fibrillation.

Always read the leaflet that comes with your medicine and speak to your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns.
Why do I need an anticoagulant?
People with atrial fibrillation (AF) are at an increased risk of stroke (where a blood vessel in the brain is blocked by a blood clot). Your doctor has prescribed you an anticoagulant to reduce this risk. Anticoagulant medicines prevent the blood from clotting as quickly as it normally does.

Why have I been prescribed a DOAC?
Warfarin has been used to prevent stroke in people with AF for many years. DOACs, such as apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban and dabigatran, are suitable alternatives to warfarin for this condition. Unlike warfarin, they are used at a fixed dose, and they do not require close monitoring of blood levels.

Before you start taking a new anticoagulant, you will be able to discuss it with your consultant. It is important that you choose a medicine that suits you best.

How do I take the medicine?
The dose and frequency (how often you need to take the medicine) will depend on which anticoagulant has been prescribed for you. This will be explained to you and will also be written on the medicine label and on your discharge letter. Please make sure you understand how to take the medicine and ask if you have any questions.

What if I miss a dose?
If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember, but don’t double up on the total daily dose. Please refer to the patient information leaflet supplied with your medicine for specific information, or call our Pharmacy Medicines Helpline for advice (please see the back page for contact details).

Are there any side effects?
Bleeding is the most common side effect of DOACs, as they increase the time it takes for your blood to clot.

Please seek medical advice immediately
if you suffer a significant blow to the head or have been involved in an accident, or if you have any of the following:
• prolonged nosebleeds (over 10 minutes)
• unusual headaches
• blood in your urine, stools or vomit
• black stools
• unexplained or severe bruising.

If you cut yourself, apply pressure as you normally would. It may take longer for the wound to stop bleeding. If the bleeding does not stop within 10 minutes, go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E). Please make sure you tell the person treating you that you are taking an anticoagulant.

What about my other medicines?
Your medicines will be reviewed when you are first prescribed a DOAC, and any necessary changes will be made.

As other medicines (including herbal remedies) may interact with DOACs, it is important that you check with a pharmacist before starting any new medicines or stopping any existing ones. You should avoid taking any other medicines that may increase your risk of bleeding (such as aspirin or ibuprofen), unless your doctor has specifically prescribed them for you.

If you need a painkiller, paracetamol and codeine are acceptable. Be aware that medicines bought in pharmacies can contain other ingredients – please speak to your pharmacist if you are unsure.

You must let other healthcare professionals treating you know that you are taking a DOAC. This includes anyone who prescribes you medication or carries out a procedure, for example, a dentist.

Do I need to change my diet or alcohol intake?
You do not need to change what you eat when taking a DOAC. You should maintain a healthy and balanced diet.
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