

Clearing up Myths about Statin Medicine

I've never been told I have high cholesterol, why do I need a statin?

Sometimes people who have a blocked artery or have a health event like a stroke or heart attack may be started on a statin. This is because your risk is now higher to have another stroke or heart attack, even though your cholesterol may be normal. The goal is to lower your risk.

Does changing my diet work as well as taking a statin?

A heart healthy diet is very important and a great way to prevent a heart attack and stroke. However, statins will lower your risk and your cholesterol more than just changing your diet.

As well, statins affect your body in other ways. Statins protect the plaque in your blood vessels from breaking open and causing a heart attack or stroke.

What kind of side effects do statins have?

Most side effects are mild (such as stomach upset) and go away over time. Less than 10 out of every 100 people who take a statin have side effects.

Is it true that statins cause serious muscle problems?

A rare side effect of statins is aching muscles. It usually affects large muscles (such as the arms or legs) on both sides of the body. Less than 10 out of every 100 people who take a statin have this side effect.

It can usually be managed by lowering the dose or changing to another brand of statin. It doesn't cause any long-term muscle damage. Rarely, muscle pain may be a sign of a serious muscle problem (about 1 out of every 10,000 people).

Is it true that statins can damage the liver?

Statins can cause a mild form of liver inflammation that usually doesn't cause symptoms. It affects up to 3 out of every 100 people who take a statin. This mild side effect doesn't cause permanent liver damage. It can usually be managed by lowering the dose or changing to another brand of statin.

It's rare that statins will cause a serious liver problem. In fact, it's so low—1 out of every 1 or 2 million people—that doing a blood test to check the liver every year is no longer recommended.

Do I have to take a statin for the rest of my life?

Yes, in most cases. High cholesterol and heart disease can't be cured. Statins work by protecting against heart attacks and strokes over many years. If you're on a statin and your cholesterol is normal, it's usually because of the drug. If you stop it, your risk will go up. This is just like medicine for diabetes and high blood pressure.

Are natural health products a good option to taking statins?

Some natural health products may lower cholesterol, but don't help prevent heart attacks and strokes. Some products, such as soluble fibre and omega-3 fatty acids, will lower cholesterol by a small amount. Red yeast rice also lowers cholesterol because it has a small amount of statin (lovastatin) in it.

Because red yeast rice already has a statin in it, it can also interact with other medicine. Talk to your healthcare provider before taking a product with red yeast rice.

Does everyone taking a statin have to take coenzyme Q10?

No. It was thought that coenzyme Q10 may help prevent muscle aches in people who take a statin.

However, most studies show that coenzyme Q10 doesn't have any benefit. Ask your healthcare provider before starting to take coenzyme Q10. It's expensive and usually not needed.

When is the best time of day to take a statin?

Both atorvastatin (Lipitor[®]) and rosuvastatin (Crestor[®]) can be taken anytime during the day. For example, a healthcare provider may ask you to take your statin in the morning with your other heart medicine. Other statins (such as simvastatin/Zocor[®]) should be taken at bedtime or with the evening meal.

Is atorvastatin (Lipitor[®]) more harmful compared to other statins?

No. Atorvastatin (Lipitor[®]) is just as safe as other statins.

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