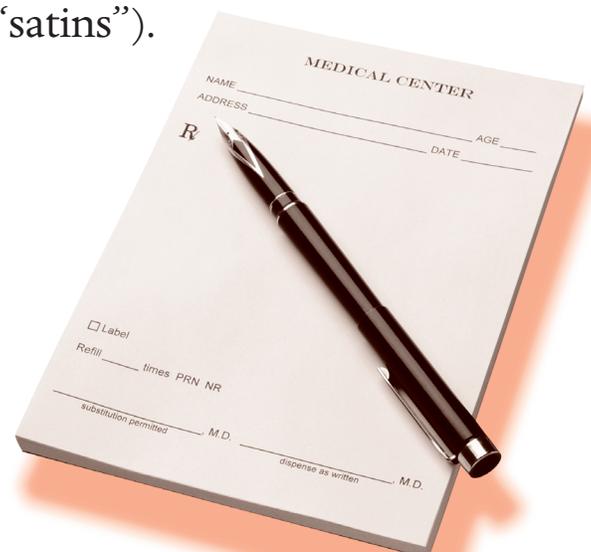


How Statins Can Help Lower Cholesterol

For people with high cholesterol, experts agree that the best first step to lowering “bad” LDL-cholesterol—*before* prescribing medication—is a healthy lifestyle. A diet with less saturated fat and cholesterol, exercise, and controlling weight are all good ways to start improving cholesterol levels. For many people, though, diet and exercise alone may not be enough. When this happens, doctors may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication.

One group of medications often prescribed for people with high cholesterol is called “statins” (rhymes with “satins”).



Bad News for “Bad” Cholesterol

Basically, a treatment plan for lowering cholesterol is aimed at lowering your level of “bad” low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol enough to lower your chance of having heart disease or a heart attack. Statins not only lower LDL cholesterol levels, but also lower LDL *more* than other types of drugs.

In 2 major clinical studies, statins were shown to greatly reduce heart attacks and deaths from coronary heart disease (CHD). The researchers concluded that statins are highly effective at lowering LDL and total cholesterol.

How Statins Work... and How Well

In the body, a special enzyme controls how much cholesterol is produced. Statins act on this enzyme to slow down the production of cholesterol, as well as help remove the LDL cholesterol already present in the bloodstream. In fact, statins do this job so well that they are the most-prescribed drugs for people with coronary heart disease who need a cholesterol-lowering medication.

In other clinical studies, people taking different types of statins have been shown to cut their levels of LDL cholesterol by up to 60%.



Statins and Safety: A Healthy Record

Most people can take statins without any major problems. In fact, serious side effects are rare. Some people may have symptoms such as an upset stomach or constipation, but these are usually temporary while the body adjusts to the medication. Rarely, people taking statins may develop liver or muscle problems.

One panel of experts has called statins “remarkably safe.” The experts, part of the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) from the National Institutes of Health, cited 5 different clinical trials, involving about 30,000 people, to reach that conclusion.

Follow Your Doctor’s Advice

If your doctor prescribes a statin as part of your cholesterol treatment program, you’ll probably be told to take your once-daily dose with your evening meal or at bedtime. This timing is important because the body manufactures more cholesterol at night than it does during the day.

About 6 to 8 weeks after you first start taking a statin, your doctor will check your LDL cholesterol level. Then a second LDL check will be taken sometime later, to see if your dosage needs to be changed.

Simple blood tests are needed to check for liver problems before and 12 weeks after start of therapy or change of dose, and periodically thereafter.

It’s important to take all medications—including statins—exactly as prescribed. Even if you take a medication for high cholesterol, you still need to follow a healthy lifestyle to reduce your risk of health problems.

Remember

Proven safe and effective, statins—like all cholesterol-lowering medications—are not a substitute for a healthy lifestyle. Be sure to follow your doctor's instructions about diet and exercise in addition to taking any medication that may be prescribed for you.