Controlling Cholesterol with Statins

When it comes to keeping your heart healthy, what foods you eat and the genes you inherit matter. Good heart health also may depend on the drugs you take. Several medicines are effective at lowering blood cholesterol levels—a key factor in good heart health. Chief among them are the statins.

**Table: Statins**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lovastatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pravastatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simvastatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluvastatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atorvastatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosuvastatin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statins (HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors) are one class of many drugs used to lower the level of cholesterol in the blood by reducing the production of cholesterol by the liver. Statins block the enzyme in the liver that is responsible for making cholesterol. Too much cholesterol can increase a person’s chance of getting heart disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States.

**Understanding Cholesterol**

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in all parts of the body. It is critical to the normal function of all cells. The body needs cholesterol for making hormones, digesting dietary fats, building cell walls, and other important processes. Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs, but cholesterol is also in some of the foods you eat.

When there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it can build up on the walls of the arteries (blood vessels that carry blood from the heart to other parts of the body). This buildup is called plaque. Over time, plaques can cause narrowing or hardening of the arteries—a condition called atherosclerosis. In short, too much cholesterol can clog your arteries and keep your heart from getting the blood it needs.

**Cholesterol Numbers That Matter**

There are no warning symptoms of...
When diet and exercise alone are not enough to reduce cholesterol to goal levels, doctors often prescribe medication—the most prominent being the statins.

State of the Statins
The main goal of cholesterol treatment is to lower LDL to levels that will not lead to or worsen heart disease. When a patient without heart disease is first diagnosed with elevated blood cholesterol, the National Cholesterol Education Program guidelines advise a six-month program of reduced dietary saturated fat and cholesterol, together with physical activity and weight control, as the primary treatment to bring levels down.

When diet and exercise alone are not enough to reduce cholesterol to goal levels, doctors often prescribe medication—the most prominent being the statins. By interfering with the production of cholesterol, statin medications can slow the formation of plaques in the arteries.

Statin medications (HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors)
• work in the liver to prevent formation of cholesterol
• are effective in lowering bad cholesterol levels and raising good cholesterol

Currently available statins
• Lovastatin (Mevacor, Altoprev)
• Pravastatin (Pravachol)
• Simvastatin (Zocor)
• Fluvastatin (Lescol)
• Atorvastatin (Lipitor)
• Rosuvastatin (Crestor)

Tips for Consumers
• Have your blood cholesterol levels checked at least once every 5 years if you are an adult 20 years or older.
• Check with your doctor. You may be able to lower your cholesterol levels by eating better and exercising more.
• Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your risk for heart disease.
• Stay active every day.
• Use the food label to choose foods lower in saturated fat, including trans fats, and calories.
• Eat more fruits and vegetables.
• Don’t stop taking any cholesterol-lowering medications you may be on without first talking to your doctor.

Find this and other Consumer Updates at www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates
Sign up for free e-mail subscriptions at www.fda.gov/consumer/consumerenews.html