

Cholesterol-Lowering Medications

Cholesterol-lowering medications (statins) are a group of medications that lower cholesterol. This helps reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. Common statins include:


- › Atorvastatin
- › Rosuvastatin
- › Simvastatin
- › Pravastatin
- › Fluvastatin
- › Lovastatin
- › Pitavastatin

For your safety, only take statin medications as prescribed. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

For people at risk of heart attack or stroke, experts recommend taking a statin, eating healthy and exercising regularly. This recommendation comes from the American College of Cardiology, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association and U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

How statins work

Statins work by reducing the amount of cholesterol made in the liver. Statins lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, or “bad” cholesterol. LDL cholesterol can stick to your blood vessels and form fatty buildup (plaque). This buildup makes it harder for blood to flow to and from the heart. This can put you at risk of heart attack and stroke.



Many studies and years of patient experiences have shown that statins can lower your chance of heart attack or stroke if you have high cholesterol, heart problems or diabetes.

Who may benefit from taking a statin

Statin can help you lower your cholesterol when healthy habits alone do not help you reach your cholesterol goals. Some people need medication to lower cholesterol because of health risks they cannot change, like family history or genetics.

You may benefit from taking a statin if you:

- › Have high cholesterol, especially high LDL cholesterol
- › Are 40 to 75 years old and have:
 - Diabetes
 - Heart or blood vessel disease (such as angina or peripheral artery disease)
- › Have already had a heart attack or stroke


Safety and side effects

Statins are one of the most studied medications. Physicians know a lot about how they work and how safe they are to use. Statins are safe for most people.

Two possible side effects are muscle aches and diarrhea. Sometimes taking a different statin helps. Call your physician if you have muscle aches or diarrhea.

Statins are processed by your liver. While you are taking a statin, your care team will check the levels of your liver enzymes.

Taking a statin may cause a small rise in blood glucose (blood sugar). This is more common for people who have prediabetes (A1C 5.7 to 6.4%) or people with more than 2 risk factors for diabetes. If you do not have prediabetes and your risk of diabetes is low, a small rise in blood sugar usually does not lead to diabetes.



Memory loss and dementia are not common side effects of taking a statin. Studies have shown that high cholesterol and plaque buildup can increase the risk of dementia. The benefits of taking a statin are greater than the risks.

Call your physician if you have questions about taking a statin.

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