

Statins: Lower Your Cholesterol



Lowering your cholesterol protects you from heart attacks and stroke. Losing weight, being more active, and changing your diet all help lower cholesterol. But sometimes you need the help of medications too.

How do statins work?

A class of drugs called statins lowers total cholesterol and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. These medications may also lower triglycerides and increase HDL (“good”) cholesterol. These drugs include *Mevacor*, *Lipitor*, *Zocor*, and other brand names.

What problems could I have taking statins?

Most people who take this medication don't have any problems. Some people do have:

- **Muscle aches/flu-like symptoms:** If you have muscle aches or flu-like symptoms and you don't have the flu, stop taking the statin medicine. Call your care manager or medical professional.
- **Possible liver irritation:** Statins can cause problems with your liver. While you are taking this medicine, simple periodic blood tests will check your liver health. If you develop a liver problem because of a statin, the liver problem will go away when you stop taking the medication. If you notice any severe fatigue, weakness, fever, decreased appetite, yellowing of the whites of your eyes or skin, or dark urine, stop taking the drug. Call your care manager or medical professional.

- **Other side effects:** Dizziness, trouble sleeping, blurred vision, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, gas, stomach cramps, heartburn, rash, or headaches. If these problems don't go away, notify your care manager or medical professional.

What other things do I need to know about statins?

- This medication may cause birth defects. If you are a woman of childbearing age, you must use birth control to prevent getting pregnant while taking statins.
- Before you have surgery, dental or emergency treatment, tell the physician or dentist that you are taking a statin medicine.
- Tell your care manager or medical professional if you have a history of liver disease or seizures.

Will taking statins affect my other medications?

- If you are taking warfarin (*Coumadin*), tell your care manager or medical professional. You will need to take a simple blood test because the warfarin level in your body may change when you are taking statins.
- Do not take this drug with erythromycin or cyclosporine. If someone prescribes these, please contact your care manager or medical professional.
- You may need to take the statin with other medications, such as gemfibrozil (*Lopid*), fenofibrate (*Tricor*), niacin (*Niaspan*), or

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nefazodone (*Serzone*). These combinations may cause muscle aches. If this happens, tell your care manager or medical professional right away.

- Avoid heavy alcohol use (2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women). Also don't eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.

What kind of follow up will I need?

You will need to get periodic cholesterol and liver blood tests to make sure that this medication is lowering your cholesterol and is not causing changes in your liver.

What do I need to know about my medications?

Before you leave the clinic, take the time to ask your doctor or member of your health care team about your medications:

- Why am I taking them?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions for taking a particular medication?
- Should I only take medications at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
- How can I avoid side effects?

How should I take statin medications?

directions	dose	tablet(s)	daily total	when to take
<input type="checkbox"/> lovastatin (<i>Mevacor</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Evening meal
<input type="checkbox"/> simvastatin (<i>Zocor</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Bedtime
<input type="checkbox"/> atorvastatin (<i>Lipitor</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Any time of day
<input type="checkbox"/> pravastatin (<i>Pravachol</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Bedtime
<input type="checkbox"/> fluvastatin (<i>Lescol</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Evening
<input type="checkbox"/> rosuvastatin (<i>Crestor</i>):	_____mg	___	_____mg	Any time of day

Be sure to tell your doctor if there are reasons why you can't take any medication that's prescribed. Also, tell your doctor if you are having trouble remembering to take your medication.

How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others—maybe they can help you remember too:

- Make a simple chart and post it someplace where you will see it every day, like the bathroom mirror.
- Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
- Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtime, or at the beginning of a TV show, you watch every day, such as the evening news.
- Use a pillbox that has seven sections, one for each day of the week.

- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of other questions? Write them here:

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.