

Statin Therapy: Preventing Heart Attacks and Strokes



If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or even if you have already had a heart attack—taking a statin every day can help keep you healthy. People who take statins daily are much less likely of having a heart attack or dying from a heart attack or stroke.

How do statins help with heart disease?

Most people think statins are just for lowering cholesterol, but they are also a very helpful medicine for your heart and blood vessels.

Statins work to lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol, which builds up in your artery walls, making them narrow. They also increase your HDL (good) cholesterol, reduce your triglycerides and may help to prevent blood clots and inflammation inside your arteries.

While taking a statin by itself is not enough to prevent heart attacks and strokes, it is an important part of your medical treatment. It is common to take other medications in addition to a statin to help protect against a heart attack or stroke. Ask your health care team about other medications that may help you.

What problems could I have taking a statin?

Most people who take this medication have few or no side effects. Some people experience mild upset stomach, gas, constipation, abdominal pain, or cramps.

Severe muscle pain (or rhabdomyolysis) is a rare side effect that happens in very few people who use statins. If you experience severe muscle pain, severe weakness, or brown urine, contact your health care professional immediately.

To reduce the risk of having problems taking a statin:

- Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation (2 drinks per day for a man, and 1 for a woman).
One drink = 12oz of beer, 4oz of wine or 1.5oz shot of hard liquor, such as brandy, gin, or vodka.

- **Do not** take a statin if you are pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future, because of the risk of birth defects.
- Avoid taking a statin if you have severe liver or kidney damage.

Can taking a statin increase my chances of liver irritation?

Most people who take statins do not develop liver problems. Blood tests are done periodically to monitor your liver function.

How do medications (in general) fit into my treatment plan?

Although medications are an important part of your treatment plan, they do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management. If you are prescribed medications by your doctor, it's important for you to take them as directed. Don't stop taking them without consulting with your doctor first. If you are experiencing side effects, your doctor may be able to change the medication or the dosage to prevent side effects. It's likely that you may need to take this

“Statins” are a group of cholesterol lowering medications that include:

- Lovastatin (Mevacor)
- Simvastatin (Zocor)

medication for the rest of your life, so work with your doctor to ensure that you are taking the right medicine and dose for you. If you feel that you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. To learn more, talk to the pharmacist or call the Medical Financial Assistance Program (MFAP) at 1-866-399-7696.

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 any medication only at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have and what symptoms should I look for?
- Is there a way to avoid any side effects?

What should I do if I have side effects?

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

How can I remember to take my medications?

Everyone has struggled with remembering to do things that they don't regularly do. There are a number of things that can help you remember.

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like on the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set an alarm clock or watch for a reminder.
- Establish a daily routine for taking your medications every day, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or while at the beginning of a daily TV show, such as the evening news.
- Use a pillbox that has seven sections, representing the days of the week.
- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others? _____

What else could I do to manage my medication?

- Keep a personal medication record card (wallet card) with you and keep it up-to-date. Include any drug or food allergies that you may have and any non-prescription medications, herbs, or supplements that you are taking.
- Review your medication record card regularly with your doctor or other health care professional, including your dentist.

- When you purchase any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two week(s) before you run out. Refills may be processed by phone, online through our Web site, or in person at the pharmacy. Refills may be delivered to your home by mail at no extra cost.
- If a doctor or other health care professional recommends it, carry some kind of medical identification like a Medic Alert bracelet. For more information, call 1-888-633-4298, or go to **MedicAlert.org**.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **members.kp.org**.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems 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 further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.