Cardiovascular Health and Statin Therapy

How do statins work?

Statins decrease the production of cholesterol. This results in less cholesterol being released into the bloodstream.

Statins also reduce the inflammatory process in the vessel wall. This causes plaque to stop growing inside the artery, so the outer coating remains strong and is less likely to rupture. This is called a stable plaque.

Who should take a statin?

- People with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes who are 40 to 75 years old.
- People of any age with a history of a cardiovascular event (heart attack, stroke, stable or unstable angina, peripheral artery disease, transient ischemic attack, or coronary or other arterial revascularization).
- People who are 40 to 75 years old and have a 7.5 percent or higher risk for having a heart attack or stroke within 10 years. Your physician will help you to determine your risk factor.
- People 21 and older who have a very high level of “bad” cholesterol (190 mg/dL or higher).
Common questions:

Is there a target number for LDL cholesterol in statin patients?
For patients taking statins, the guidelines say they no longer need to get LDL cholesterol levels down to a specific target number. Thus, the current guidelines focus instead on matching a patient’s heart attack and stroke risk level with the dose of statin.

What about the cost of taking another medication?
Most, including high-intensity statins, are now available in generic versions for as little as $4 for a month’s supply.

If I am taking a statin, do I still need to follow a heart healthy diet and lifestyle?
A healthy lifestyle should always accompany statin therapy.
A diet high in saturated and trans fats works against the statin and raises the LDL cholesterol.
Eating a heart-healthy diet, being physically active on a regular basis, not smoking, and staying at a healthy weight all work together with statins to result in a healthy heart and blood vessels.

Will taking a statin reduce my risk of having a heart attack or stroke?
Yes, for someone taking a statin, the risk for a heart attack or stroke drops by about 20 percent for each 39 mg/dL reduction in bad (LDL) cholesterol.

What about the side effects?
Most side effects are mild and generally go away as your body adjusts. Muscle problems and liver abnormalities are rare. Talk to your provider if you have concerns.

The following lifestyle changes may help decrease your risk of heart disease:

- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week or — best of all — at least 30 minutes every day
- If you are overweight, set a goal of losing 10-15 pounds
- Don’t use tobacco — and avoid secondhand smoke
- Follow a heart healthy meal plan
  - Choose foods that add healthy fiber to your diet such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts
  - Choose lean meats and poultry without skin
  - Eat oily fish containing omega-3 fatty acids (for example, salmon, trout and herring) twice a week
  - Select fat-free, 1 percent fat and low-fat dairy products
  - Cut back on foods containing trans fat, and beverages and foods with added sugars
  - If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. That means no more than one drink per day if you’re a woman and no more than two drinks per day if you’re a man

- Attend Food for Life Class. You will learn how therapeutic lifestyle changes can improve your cholesterol levels, the importance choosing healthy proteins and fats, how to add fiber and vegetables to your diet, and much more. The cost to attend this one hour class is only $20.00. One additional guest can attend for free, but must share the informational packet. Call 651-430-8715 for exact dates and times, or visit lakeviewhealth.org/classes.