



What Are Cholesterol-Lowering Medicines?

If your doctor decided you need cholesterol-lowering medicine, it's because you're at high risk for heart attack or stroke. Treatment usually combines healthy lifestyle changes, including diet and physical activity, and medicine.

Most heart attacks and many strokes are caused by a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances called **plaque** in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries become clogged and narrowed, and blood flow is reduced. If a blood clot forms and blocks blood flow to your heart, it causes a heart attack. If a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.

You can help prevent a heart attack or stroke by working with your doctor to reduce your cholesterol levels and other risk factors.



What medicine may I be prescribed?

Various medicines can lower blood cholesterol levels. Statins are recommended for most patients. They have been directly associated with reducing risk for heart attack and stroke. Statins continue to provide the most effective LDL-lowering treatment in most cases.

Statins (HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors) prevent the production of cholesterol in the liver. Their major effect is to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Some names are lovastatin, pravastatin, simvastatin, fluvastatin and atorvastatin.

Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of statin therapy if you are in one of the following groups:

- Adults with known cardiovascular disease (CVD), including stroke, caused by atherosclerosis
- Adults aged 40-75 years with diabetes
- Adults with LDL-cholesterol (LDL-C) level of greater than or equal to 190 mg/dL
- Adults, aged 40 – 75 years, with LDL-C level of 70-189 mg/

dL and a 5% to less than 20% 10-year risk of developing CVD from atherosclerosis, with risk enhancing factors

- Adults aged 40 – 75 years, with LDL-C level of 70-189 mg/dL and a 20% or greater 10-year risk of developing CVD from atherosclerosis

Some people who aren't in these groups also may benefit from statin therapy.

What other drugs may be prescribed?

Your doctor will monitor your progress on your statin therapy. If you're having serious side effects or don't have the desired response to statin therapy and lifestyle changes, your doctor may change the dose or consider adding on other medicines.

If you have CVD and are already taking the highest statin you can tolerate and your LDL-C is still 70 mg/dL or above, one or more of the following medicines may be prescribed. They all can be given with a statin.

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Ezetimibe (cholesterol absorption inhibitors) works by preventing cholesterol from being absorbed in the intestine. It's the most commonly used non-statin agent.

Bile acid sequestrants cause the intestine to get rid of more cholesterol. Some names are cholestyramine, cholestipol and colesevelam.

PCSK9 inhibitors are powerful LDL-lowering drugs. They bind to and inactivate a protein in liver to lower LDL (bad) cholesterol. Some names are alirocumab and evolocumab.

Fibrates and **niacin** are triglyceride-lowering drugs that have mild LDL-lowering action, but data does not support their use as an add-on to statins. Take niacin only if it's prescribed.

Your doctor will work with you to decide which medicine, or combination of medicines, is best for you. Always follow your doctor's instructions, and let them know if you have any side effects. Never stop taking your medicine on your own!

How do I know if my medicine is working?

Your doctor will test your blood cholesterol levels as needed to monitor your progress.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families, at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What if I forgot a dose?

Should I avoid any foods or other medicines?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.