



Health Hint article by David Coory

David Coory is the author of the nutrition book "Stay Healthy by Supplying What's Lacking in Your Diet" and Executive Director of Zealand Publishing House and Health House.

Should you take a cholesterol-lowering drug?

Every day, nearly a quarter of a million New Zealanders take cholesterol-lowering statin drugs such as Lipitor, Lipex or Zocor.

These drugs have become massive profit generators for the drug industry.

But high cholesterol is not the risk factor in heart disease that drug manufacturers would like you to believe.

Cholesterol protective rather than harmful

Researchers at the University of San Diego School of Medicine point out that high cholesterol in those over 50 years of age is protective rather than harmful. And that low cholesterol is a risk factor for heart arrhythmia, the leading cause of death when heart attack occurs.

Also the American Medical Association state, "After the age of 50, there is no increased overall death rate associated with high cholesterol." ('Cholesterol and Mortality' 1987)

In fact medical researchers have found that cholesterol levels of 275 to 400 mg/dL are safer than levels of 188 mg/dL or lower. Many people who feel perfectly healthy have high cholesterol – in fact, feeling good is actually a sign of high cholesterol.

Drug marketing spin to promote sales

The Dept of Pharmacology at the University of British Columbia reviewed the 10 major statin trials conducted to-date, and came to these conclusions:

1. Only 1 of 71 people (1.4%) taking statins will have a heart attack or stroke prevented every 3-5 years.
2. The death rate of those taking statins was just as high as those not taking statins. There was no increase in longevity.

The 1 patient in 71 protected, would still die in the meantime from another disorder.

Incredibly, drug marketers have 'spun' results from these same trials as: "Over 5 years, patients taking this (statin) drug had 34% fewer heart attacks compared to controls who took a placebo." This is the drug industry marketing message your doctor is hearing.

Side effects of statin drugs

The most common side effects of statin drugs are muscle pain and weakness, and mental foginess or depression.

50% of users give up taking them during the first year because of these and other side effects. They are mostly due to the depletion of Co-Q10, a nutrient made in our liver (just like cholesterol) that supports muscle and brain function.

A Columbia University study found that statins reduce CoQ10 levels in the body by about half in 30 days.

Although drug marketers claim that only 2-3 percent of patients get muscle aches and cramps, in one study, 98 percent of patients taking Lipitor suffered from muscle problems.

Mental foginess

Cholesterol is essential to every cell in our body, especially our brain cells. There are numerous reports of foggy thinking and mild depression from those taking statins.

Dr. Beatrice Golomb, Professor of Medicine at the University of California, who studies statin side effects reports, "We have people who have lost thinking ability so rapidly (from using statins) that within a couple of months they went from being head of major divisions of companies, to not being able to balance a checkbook and being fired from their company."

Alzheimer's patients tend to have very low levels of cholesterol in their brain cells. And researchers at the University of North Carolina found that men with low (LDL) cholesterol levels (between 91 and 135) had six times the likelihood of having Parkinson's than those with levels above 135.

80% of cholesterol made by our body

Only a small portion of the cholesterol in our body comes from our diet. 80% or more is made by our body in the liver. When our intake from food increases, our liver normally makes less.

Main causes of high cholesterol

Cholesterol levels tend to rise or fall in our blood, according to the amount of stress in our life.

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