

## **Please panic now about your cholesterol, and get a drug to fix it, if you want to please your MD**

If you are a typical American adult, your total cholesterol is somewhere around 200. Whereas this number used to be considered normal for total cholesterol, it is now considered borderline for cholesterol-lowering drugs in the "statin" category. Just a few years ago, the upper limit for normal cholesterol was 220, with anything below considered to be normal. Now the upper limit is only 200, which has taken untold millions of healthy Americans into a "disease" category. Isn't it handy that the drug companies happen to have the cure for that "disease" in the form of the best-selling class of drugs, namely statins, and the best-selling drug of all time, namely Lipitor? Surely the \$26 billion dollar statin market must be a coincidence. Nobody would want to make all that money just by telling people that they are now sick. Would they?

Our message to you on the topic is this: be very wary of cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Some of the worst problems actually happen if cholesterol falls too low: stroke, aggressive behavior, depression and suicide are risks for anyone with total cholesterol below 180. For women, low cholesterol has been a proven risk for heart disease. In fact, a study in France determined that elderly women with very high cholesterol live the longest, and that the death rate was 5 times higher for women who had low cholesterol than high cholesterol. [1,2]

The means to obtain low cholesterol is also dangerous. That is, statin drugs have their own associated risks. When a 1991 study of lovastatin found that there were so many more deaths in the patients receiving this drug that the statistics began to show borderline significance, the study was abruptly stopped early and never resumed. [3]

In most animal studies, cancer, particularly breast cancer, was seen more often in those on the cholesterol-lowering drugs. [4]

Statin drugs deplete Co-enzyme Q10, which is an enzyme in our bodies that is vital for muscle function. This enzyme, also called Co-Q10 is necessary to keep our liver enzymes stable and to keep every muscle, including the heart, which is mostly muscle, in a healthy state. For this reason, statin drugs are dangerous for the heart. Even more essential, Co-Q10 is necessary to transfer energy from the food we eat to our cells. Cholesterol too is essential for life. In fact, every membrane of every cell depends on cholesterol for its fluidity and function. No life on earth can exist without cholesterol. In a study of 3700 people, low cholesterol was also associated with hemorrhagic-type stroke. Patients with cholesterol below 180 were found to have twice the risk of that type of stroke as people with cholesterol above 230. [5] However, the same study found that people with cholesterol above 280 had twice the risk of the other kind of stroke, ischemic stroke, as someone with total cholesterol of 230.

On the other hand, there are risks associated with cholesterol being high. A cholesterol of 240 is generally associated with heart disease in men, however, not in women and not in those over the age of 70. Brian Vonk, MD is a doctor who likes seeing total cholesterol over 300 in his patients over 70 years old. He also likes to see your HDL cholesterol (known as the "good" cholesterol) be at least 29% to 30% of your total cholesterol. [6]

The bottom line is cholesterol is not the major villain in heart disease or any other kind of disease. If cholesterol becomes oxidized, it can irritate or inflame the tissues such as the blood vessel lining in which it is sequestered. This is why antioxidants, Vitamins C and E for example, are so necessary and beneficial for the cardiovascular system.

In fact, we cannot live without cholesterol. It is the precursor of Vitamin D in our bodies, which has shown to be the number one cancer preventing mechanism. It is also the precursor of all of our steroid hormones, also essential for life, hormones such as testosterone, estrogen, progesterone and cortisol.

What to do if your doctor throws a tantrum about your cholesterol

A lot of perfectly healthy people have cholesterol above 200. Yet the conventional medical doctor sees a different picture and utters dire warnings about impending heart disease risk. Having looked into statin drugs, you know to stay out of that trap. Yet the primary care doctor is insisting that you lower your cholesterol. What do you do?

A lot of people in this situation end up going to the health food store instead and asking the clerk for a recommendation. Unfortunately, many then walk out of the store with red yeast rice, which is itself a problem.

The problem with red yeast rice is that it is identical to the statin drugs. In fact, it became the first ever naturally occurring substance to be patented when Merck patented the same yeast, *Monascus purpureus*, which it then called lovastatin, or by its trade name, Mevacor. Therefore, the possible side effects of red yeast rice include muscle degeneration, which can affect the heart. The heart is basically muscle.

There are much better ways to manage your cholesterol.

Let's say you want to compromise between what your doctor demands and a truly health cholesterol. Here is the best way to do it: distilled fish oil or cod liver oil by the tablespoon. For a person who is not on blood-thinning medication, or taking daily aspirin or high doses of Vitamin E or ginkgo - all of which can thin blood - I like to start my patients on two tablespoons of fish oil or cod liver oil a day. This can be made more tolerable if you make sure to buy a fruit flavored oil. Carlsons and Nordic Naturals are both good companies that distill their fish oil to remove heavy metals, and they have lemon or peach flavors. You can find both in most health food stores. After a while on two tablespoons, not only does the total cholesterol lower somewhat, but much more importantly, the "good" HDL cholesterol rises as the "bad" LDL cholesterol falls. Then I lower the dose to a tablespoon a day for most patients and stay at that dose long term, as a simply tonic food for the brain and the blood vessels. I find that most people who read something about fish oil or heard about it from another doctor, dose it way too low to be of benefit. They tend to take a few capsules, which amounts to about a teaspoon - being quite a bit less than an effective dose.

#### references

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