

Patient information leaflet



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STARTING ON A STATIN TO PREVENT HEART AND VASCULAR DISEASE AND STROKE

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WHAT IS THIS PILL FOR?

Statins are a treatment to lower your cholesterol level. Cholesterol is a type of fat, or lipid, found in your blood.

WHY AM I BEING ADVISED TO TAKE IT?

Lower cholesterol levels have been shown to reduce your chance of having a heart attack or stroke in the future. This is because high levels of cholesterol can 'furl up' your blood vessels, increasing the risk of a blood clot forming, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Based on your current level of risk, you are likely to benefit from lowering your cholesterol.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHOLESTEROL LEVEL?

A cholesterol level of 5 mmol/l or less is good, with levels of 4 mmol/l or less being ideal. However, there are different types of cholesterol and the ratio of 'good' cholesterol (HDL cholesterol, which helps to remove cholesterol from your blood) to 'bad' cholesterol (LDL cholesterol, which 'furs up' your blood vessels) is also important.

WHAT DOSE SHOULD I TAKE?

The dose of statin prescribed will depend on your cholesterol level. If you are experiencing high cholesterol levels (> 5–6 mmol/l), then your doctor may choose to prescribe a more powerful statin, which will lower your cholesterol more efficiently. Rosuvastatin is the most powerful of the new statins. Your doctor will probably start you on a low dose of rosuvastatin and gradually increase your dose but not more than once every two to four weeks.

WHEN SHOULD I TAKE IT?

Some cholesterol comes from your food but it is important to realise that your body also makes its own cholesterol in your liver. Most of this cholesterol is made at nighttime, so you may get more benefit if you take your tablet at nighttime too. Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you think this may be difficult for any reason.

HOW WILL I KNOW IT IS WORKING?

Studies have shown that statins reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes. For this reason, there is no need to have a routine blood test to check your lipid levels once you have started on your tablet. However your liver function will be tested at three and 12 months to ensure that

the drug is suiting you.

HOW LONG SHOULD I TAKE IT FOR?

Your cholesterol level will be lowered by taking the tablets. If you stop taking them, your cholesterol will rise again. For this reason, we advise that you should keep taking the tablets for as long as possible, and ideally, for life.

WHAT COMMON SIDE EFFECTS MIGHT I EXPECT?

Side effects from statins are surprisingly rare. However, all drugs have side effects – even 'dummy' pills used in medical trials have been shown to cause side effects in some people, so it is not always the tablet that is to blame. With statins, rare side effects include muscle or joint pains, lack of energy, constipation and indigestion and you should let your doctor, nurse or pharmacist know if these occur. It is important to remember, however, that the likely benefits from statins are greater than the risks, for the majority of people.

WHAT IF I DECIDE THAT I DO NOT WANT TO TAKE THESE PILLS?

Your doctor or nurse will have advised you to take these tablets because you are likely to benefit from reducing your risk of a heart attack or stroke. High cholesterol does not make you feel unwell so it can sometimes be difficult to understand why you should take a tablet for the rest of your life. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that huge medical trials have proven the benefit of these pills in reducing the risk of heart attack or stroke.

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?

You can – and should – try to eat healthily and reduce your overall fat intake. Taking regular exercise such as walking can raise your 'good' cholesterol. You should also try to lose weight if you need to. Taking statins will add to these changes. Mildly raised cholesterol can be improved by diet and exercise but studies show that statins will lower the levels further.

CAN MY CHOLESTEROL GO TOO LOW?

Statins have been used for more than 30 years and no significant long-term problems have been shown in any of the trials. Recent trials have looked at lowering cholesterol levels to 3 mmol/l or less and, overall, it seems the lower the level, the less the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Source: *Medline Plus* and *British Journal of Primary Care Nursing*.