



# STATIN THERAPY

## PREVENTING HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES

If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or even if you have already had a heart attack—taking a statin every day can help keep you healthy. People who take statins daily are much less likely to have a heart attack or die from a heart attack or stroke.

### How do statins help with heart disease?

Most people think statins are just for lowering cholesterol, but they are helpful for your heart and blood vessels in other ways as well.

Statins work to lower your LDL (bad) cholesterol, which builds up in your artery walls, making them narrow. They also increase your HDL (good) cholesterol, reduce your triglycerides and may help to prevent blood clots and inflammation inside your arteries.

While taking a statin by itself is not enough to prevent heart attacks and strokes, it is an important part of your medical treatment. It is common to take other medications in addition to a statin to help protect against a heart attack or stroke. Ask your health care team about other medications that may help you.

### What problems could I have taking a statin?

Most people who take this medication have few or no side effects. Some people experience mild upset stomach, gas, constipation, abdominal pain, or cramps.

Severe muscle pain (or rhabdomyolysis) is a rare side effect that happens in very few people who use statins. If you experience severe muscle pain, severe weakness, or brown urine, contact your health care professional immediately.

### To reduce the risk of having problems taking a statin:

- Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation (no more than 2 drinks per day for a man, and 1 for a woman).  
One drink = 12oz of beer, 4oz of wine or 1.5oz shot of hard liquor, such as brandy, gin, or vodka.
- **Do not** take a statin if you are pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future, because of the risk of birth defects.
- Avoid taking a statin if you have severe liver or kidney damage.

### Can taking a statin increase my chances of liver irritation?

Most people who take statins do not develop liver problems. Blood tests are done periodically to monitor your liver function.

### How do medications (in general) fit into my treatment plan?

Although medications are an important part of your treatment plan, they do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management.

If you are prescribed medications by your doctor, it's important for you to take them as directed. Don't stop taking them without consulting with him or her first. Be sure to tell your health care professional if there are reasons why you cannot take any medication that's prescribed. Also, tell your health care professional if you seem to have trouble remembering to take your medications.

It's likely that you may need to take this medication for your whole life, so work with your health care professional to ensure that your medicine and dose are right for you.

If you believe you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. To learn

“Statins” are a group of cholesterol-lowering medications that include:

- lovastatin (Mevacor)
- simvastatin (Zocor)
- pravastatin (Pravachol)

more, talk to the pharmacist or call the Medical Financial Assistance Program at 1-866-399-7696.

## What do I need to know about my medications?

Before you leave the clinic, take the time to ask your doctor or a member of your health care team about your medications. Ask:

- Why am I taking them?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions for taking this medication?
- Should I always take medications at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
- How can I avoid side effects?

## What should I do if I have side effects?

If you are experiencing side effects, your health care professional may be able to change the medication or the dosage to prevent the side effects.

## How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others; maybe they can help you too.

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like the bathroom mirror.
- Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
- Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtime, or at the beginning of an activity you do every day, such as watching the evening news.
- Use a pillbox with seven sections, one for each day of the week.
- Record your medication on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

## What else could I do to manage my medication?

- Keep an up-to-date personal medication record card (wallet card) with you. Include any drug or food allergies that you may have and any over-the-counter or non-prescription medications, herbal products, vitamins, or supplements that you are taking.

- Review your medication record card regularly with your health care professionals, including your dentist.
- When you buy any new medications, including over-the-counter drugs or herbal products, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two weeks before you run out. Refills may be processed by phone, online through our Web site, or in person at the pharmacy. Refills may be delivered to your home by mail at no extra cost.
- If a health care professional recommends it, carry some kind of medical identification, like a Medic Alert bracelet. For more information, call 1-888-663-4298 or go to **MedicAlert.org**.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org**.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to **ndvh.org**.