



Statin Therapy

Preventing Heart Attacks and Strokes

If you're at risk for heart (cardiovascular) disease or already had a heart attack, taking a statin medication daily can help protect you. Research finds that this can significantly reduce your chances of having a heart attack and of dying from heart attack or stroke. Ask your doctor about your 10-year risk for cardiovascular disease.

How do statins help with heart disease?

You may already know that statins help manage cholesterol levels in the blood. They also benefit your heart and blood vessels in other ways.

Statins can:

- Lower LDL (low-density lipoproteins, or unhealthy cholesterol). This helps reduce or prevent atherosclerosis (narrowed or blocked blood vessels).
- Increase HDL (high-density lipoproteins, or healthy cholesterol). This helps reduce LDL.
- Reduce triglycerides (another fatty substance that affects heart disease).

Taking a statin may also help prevent blood clots and blood-vessel inflammation.

Although they're important, statins alone aren't enough to prevent heart attack and stroke. Many patients take additional medications. Ask your doctor about other medications to protect you from heart disease.

What problems could I have taking a statin?

Most people have few or no side effects from taking statins. Some people have mild upset stomach, gas, constipation, belly (abdominal) pain, or mild muscle cramps. If you have side effects, talk with your doctor about changing the dose or type of statin. This often resolves the problem.

Severe muscle pain (rhabdomyolysis) is rare. If you have severe muscle pain or weakness or brown urine, contact your doctor immediately.

Most people don't develop liver problems while taking statins. Patients taking statins have regular blood tests to check their liver function.

To reduce the possibility of side effects, you can:

- Avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice.
- Drink no more than 2 drinks a day (men) or 1 drink a day (women), or not at all. One drink = 12 oz beer, 4 oz wine, or 1 oz shot of hard liquor, such as brandy, gin, or vodka. (If transgender, refer to your gender at birth.)

Don't take a statin if you:

- Are pregnant or might become pregnant. Statins can cause birth defects.
- Have severe liver or kidney damage.

Before you have surgery or dental or emergency treatment, tell your clinician you're taking a statin.

How do statins and other medications fit into my heart health treatment plan?

Medications are an important part of your treatment plan. Making heart-healthy choices is just as important. This includes eating healthy, getting 30 minutes of physical activity daily, and managing stress. Together with your doctor, you'll create a heart-healthy living plan. Also, be sure to manage your blood sugar if you have diabetes.

What do I need to know about how to take a statin?

It's important to take your statin consistently and as directed by your doctor. Don't stop taking it without talking to your doctor first. Stopping can increase your risk of cardiovascular problems. Also let your doctor know if you have trouble remembering to take your medication.

You'll probably need to continue taking a statin for your whole life. Check with your doctor to make sure your medication and dose are right for you.

Use this chart to know when and how to take the type of statin you're prescribed.

How should I take statin medications

Medicine	Dose	Tablet(s)	Daily total	When to take
• simvastatin (Zocor):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Bedtime
• atorvastatin (Lipitor):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Any time of day
• lovastatin (Mevacor):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Evening meal
• pravastatin (Pravachol):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Bedtime
• fluvastatin (Lescol):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Evening
• rosuvastatin (Crestor):	_____ mg	_____	_____ mg	Any time of day

If you can't afford your medication, you may be eligible for financial assistance. Talk to your Kaiser Permanente pharmacist or call the Medical Financial Assistance Program at 1-866-399-7696.

If your doctor or pharmacist recommends it, carry a MedicAlert bracelet or other identification about medications you take. For information, call 1-888-663-4298 or visit MedicAlert.org.

You can also 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 medications, herbal products, vitamins, or supplements you're taking.

Other resources

- Connect to our website at kp.org/mydoctor.
- Contact your local Health Education 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 thehotline.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.