

Avoiding the Dangers of Cholesterol Lowering Medications

By Dr. Christopher Napoli, Chiropractor

Every day thousands, maybe tens of thousands of Americans are told by their doctors that they have high cholesterol. The doctor usually makes generic recommendations that they cut back on high cholesterol foods, lower their saturated fat intake, and get more exercise. A follow-up test is usually done in a few months and, since there was no major change in cholesterol levels, the doctor prescribes one of many cholesterol lowering medications available today.

A few months later a new follow-up blood test is taken and, miraculously, the cholesterol level drops dramatically. Certain disaster has been avoided, and the patient leaves the doctor's office happy and seemingly healthy.

This scenario plays itself out daily, but the story doesn't stop there. The cholesterol lowering drugs most commonly prescribed fall into the category of "statin" drugs. The most common ones include Mevacor, Zocor, Pravachol, and Lipitor. These drugs lower cholesterol by blocking an enzyme in the liver that is involved in the production of cholesterol. As a result, cholesterol levels drop very quickly.

Unfortunately, these drugs are toxic to the liver. This is why most doctors will recommend periodic blood tests to monitor the patient's liver function. If the drug is doing too much damage the patient will be taken off of them. If the danger is considered acceptable the drug is continued.

These drugs pose another danger, however, that is not monitored. This is mainly because most doctors are unaware of it. The enzymes in the liver that are involved in the production of cholesterol are also involved in the production of Coenzyme Q10. CoQ10 is a substance that is like a vitamin. It is essential for normal liver function as well as energy production throughout the cells of the body.

It is especially essential to the heart muscle, where it allows that "perpetual motion machine" to produce the energy and utilize oxygen efficiently enough to keep you alive. When analyzed, the heart muscle has the highest concentration of CoQ10 in the body. Without it, the heart muscle becomes weak and unable to pump enough blood. This leads to weakness, fluid build-up in the lungs and extremities and ultimately death. This is a condition called congestive heart failure. Patients with congestive heart failure have a measurable deficiency in CoQ10.

Congestive heart failure seems to be reaching epidemic proportions in this country. In the last 15 years the incidence has almost tripled. Many researchers believe that this rise is linked to the prescription of these statin drugs. They were introduced by Merck & Co. in 1987, and in one recent

study, patients demonstrated a 40% drop in blood CoQ10 levels while on them.

It appears that Merck knows about the problem. According to Julian Whitaker, MD, editor of *Health & Healing* newsletter, Merck & Co. sought and received two patents for Mevacor and other statin drugs combined with 1,000 milligrams of coenzyme Q10, back in 1990. Their reason, according to the patents filed, is "for the avoidance of myopathy." Cardiac myopathy is a common cause of congestive heart failure. Merck also holds a second patent for the same combined product "for the avoidance of liver damage."

To date Merck has not brought this product to market. It also has not educated physicians as to the benefits of supplementing with CoQ10 to counter the dangers of static drugs to the liver and heart. I don't know why.

If you have high cholesterol consider the natural approach. A targeted nutritional program and a customized supplement regimen can do wonders for lowering your cholesterol naturally. One supplement, which is as effective as some of the statin drugs, is a special formulation of niacin.

Niacin is vitamin B-3. While niacin alone will lower cholesterol and blood lipids, it also can have uncomfortable side effects such as hot flashes (flushing), itchy red skin, and at high doses, liver toxicity. A remarkable formulation of niacin combined with inositol is called *inositol hexaniacinate*. This form of niacin has no side effects and lowers cholesterol and other blood lipids extremely well.

This niacin formulation has been used safely for years in Europe. In recent studies, done both with people and animals, inositol hexaniacinate resulted in a 62% reduction in total blood lipids, a 74.9% reduction in total cholesterol, and a 63.2 % reduction in triglycerides. This was significantly more effective than niacin alone, with no liver toxicity or other side effects.

If you have elevated cholesterol consider a consultation with a nutritional professional to attempt lowering it naturally. If you are already on a statin drug, it is highly recommended that you take 120-200 milligrams of coenzyme Q10 per day to protect your heart and liver.

Be sure to get your CoQ10 from a reputable company. CoQ10 is a bit pricey because it is made only by a limited number of manufacturers abroad. Every supplement manufacturer must buy from these suppliers. This means that the price will be within a few dollars from brand to brand. If you see something for significantly cheaper steer clear. Unscrupulous companies have been found to be selling fake CoQ10 at bargain prices. True, the good stuff may be expensive, but ask someone waiting for a heart or liver transplant how much they would spend.

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