

Statins

What are statins?

Statins are a class of prescription medications that lower “bad” cholesterol (LDL) and raise “good” cholesterol (HDL). There are several different statin medications available. Examples include lovastatin (Mevacor), pravastatin (Pravachol), simvastatin (Zocor), atorvastatin (Lipitor), rosuvastatin (Crestor), pitavastatin (Livalo), and fluvastatin (Lescol). Combination medications are also available, such as simvastatin/ezetimibe (Vytorin) and others. Your doctor will recommend a specific medication based on your situation. Statins should always be used with exercise and a heart-healthy diet (see page 2).

What do they do?

Statins work by blocking an enzyme involved in how the body makes cholesterol. Blocking this enzyme helps your body achieve a better balance between “bad” (LDL) cholesterol and “good” (HDL) cholesterol. Your doctor can check your cholesterol by doing simple lab tests.

Why is this medication important for my health?

- **Abnormal cholesterol is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke.** “Bad” cholesterol (LDL cholesterol) can build up in the walls of your blood vessels and block the blood flow.
- **Along with a heart-healthy diet and exercise, statins are one of the most effective ways to lower “bad” cholesterol.** Studies have shown that statins can lower your chances of a heart attack up to 37%.
- If your doctor prescribes a statin, it’s often because a lab test has shown that your cholesterol is abnormal. It may also be prescribed — regardless of your initial cholesterol level — if you have diabetes or certain other chronic illnesses, or if you’ve had a heart attack or stroke.



Statins are medications that lower “bad” (LDL) cholesterol and raise “good” (HDL) cholesterol.

Statin therapy works best when it’s combined with a heart-healthy diet and an exercise program.

Guidelines for taking statins

You should always follow your doctor’s specific instructions for taking any medication, including statins. But there are some general rules that will probably apply to you:

- Before you start a statin (and while taking it), **eat a diet that helps to lower cholesterol** (see page 2).
- **Be sure your doctor knows about anything else you take for your health**, like vitamins, herbal supplements, or other over-the-counter and prescription medications.
- **If you have a history of liver problems, tell your doctor.** Statins are broken down in the body by the liver. Sometimes liver function tests may be needed while you’re taking statins.
- **Take it exactly as instructed.** Most statins should be taken once a day in the evening. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it’s already time for your next dose, just take the usual amount. Do not double your dose.
- **Tell your doctor about any side effects you notice.** See page 2.

What are the side effects?

People can usually take statins without any problem, but side effects can happen for some people.

- **Statins can sometimes cause sore or aching muscles.** If you notice this after starting a statin, tell your doctor. Your doctor may be able to change the dose, change how often you take it, or switch to another statin.
- **Statins may interact with other medications used to treat cardiovascular disease.** Whenever you visit a new doctor, make sure the doctor knows you are taking a statin.
- **Statins can affect your liver function.** Always tell your doctor if you have a history of liver problems.

When to call or see your doctor

Get in touch with your doctor if:

- You have questions about how to take your medication.
- You're thinking about stopping your medication. (Never stop without talking to your doctor first.)
- You're having new muscle pains or aches.

My medication

Name: _____

Strength (mg per pill): _____

How much to take / when to take: _____

Other instructions: _____

Other ways to help lower your cholesterol

Before you take statin medication — and while you're taking it — you should also use your diet and exercise to help lower your cholesterol.

- **Start or continue an exercise program.** For advice, talk to your doctor. Any kind of activity is better than nothing — it's fine to start small if you increase your activity over time.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** See the Nutrition Center at the American Heart Association (www.heart.org) or ask your doctor for a copy of Intermountain's *Nutrition for a Healthy Heart* booklet. Here are some tips:
 - **Eat lots of fruits and vegetables.** In a typical meal, half your plate should be fruits or vegetables.
 - **Eat more whole grains.** Examples include whole-grain bread, whole-wheat noodles, and brown rice.
 - **Choose heart-healthy proteins.** These include fish and shellfish, chicken and turkey without the skin, nuts, beans, and soy products.
 - **Choose unsaturated fats and oils.** Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature and comes mostly from plant sources. Examples include olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, vegetable oils, and avocados.
 - **Choose low-fat dairy products.** Stick with products that are 1% fat or less.