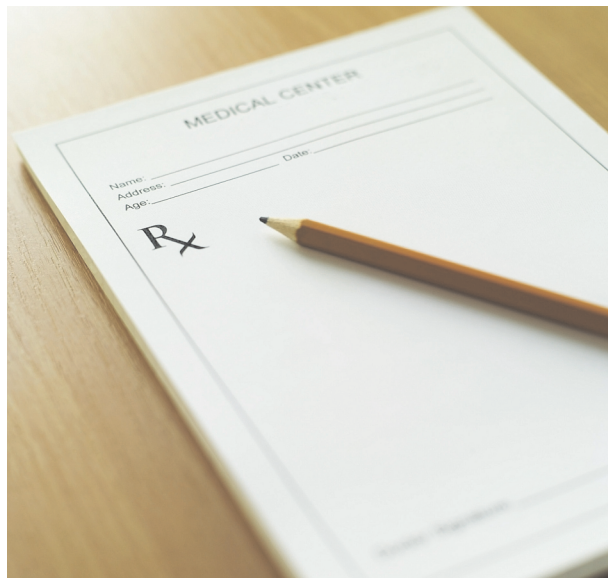


High Cholesterol: Medicines



Many different medicines are used to treat high cholesterol and other fats in the blood. Statin medicines are the most widely used. They can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Other medicines treat high cholesterol in different ways and may be used along with statins.

There are good and bad types of cholesterol in your blood. Medicine can help lower bad cholesterol (LDL). And it can help raise good cholesterol (HDL). High HDL can protect against heart attack.

Statins

How they work: Statin medicines reduce how much cholesterol your body makes. They include lovastatin, pravastatin, and simvastatin.

Statins are sometimes combined with other medicines for cholesterol or blood pressure.

Side effects are possible when you take statins.

- You may feel tired.
- You may have minor muscle aches (not severe pain).
- You may have belly pain, gas, cramps, constipation, or an upset stomach.

- Your liver may be affected. You will need routine blood tests to check for liver problems.

Call your doctor **right away** if you have severe muscle pain, muscle tenderness or weakness, or brown urine. These can be signs of a severe muscle reaction.

Other medicines

Cholesterol absorption inhibitors

How they work: These medicines lower the amount of cholesterol your body can absorb. An example is ezetimibe. It may also be combined with a statin.

Side effects are possible. You will need regular doctor visits and tests to check your cholesterol level and to check for side effects.

Bile acid sequestrants

How they work: These medicines affect how your liver removes cholesterol from the blood. They include cholestyramine, colestipol, and colesevelam.

Side effects are possible:

- You may be constipated, have gas, or feel bloated.
- You may feel sick to your stomach.

Nicotinic acid (niacin)

How it works: Prescription niacin can improve LDL, HDL, and triglyceride levels. (Triglycerides are another type of fat.) Talk to your doctor before taking over-the-counter niacin. Your doctor will help you know which medicine to buy and how much to take.

Side effects are possible:

- Your face may get red, itchy, or flushed.
- You may have an upset stomach, gas, vomiting, and diarrhea.

- You may feel dizzy or have a fast heartbeat.
- Your liver may be affected. You will need routine blood tests to check for liver problems.

Fibrates

How they work: These medicines are used to raise HDL and lower triglycerides. They include fenofibrate and gemfibrozil.

Side effects are possible:

- You may have belly pain or a rash.
- You may have nausea or vomiting.

Taking these medicines

- **Take all medicines exactly as prescribed.** Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Tell your doctor everything you take, including vitamins or herbal supplements. Some medicines may react with statins or other drugs.
- You may need regular blood tests to check your liver.
- Ask your doctor if you need to avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice because of the medicine you take.

When to call your doctor

Muscle pain can be a very serious but rare side effect of statins. **Call your doctor now** if you have severe muscle pain, weakness, or brown urine. This can be a sign of a very serious muscle reaction called rhabdomyolysis.

Liver inflammation is another rare side effect. It may not cause symptoms, so it is important that you have the blood tests your doctor orders to check your liver.

Lifestyle changes

Along with taking medicines, you need to make lifestyle changes to improve your cholesterol.

- Eat healthy foods.
- Get plenty of exercise.
- Lose weight if you need to.

Lifestyle changes will help lower cholesterol. And they will make your medicines work better.