

High cholesterol? Bye, cholesterol.

Here's what you need to know about statin therapy.



Understanding your cholesterol

Not all cholesterol is bad. But too much of it causes a waxy buildup in your arteries called plaque that increases your risk for heart attack, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.

Your doctor keeps tabs on your cholesterol with a simple blood test known as a lipid panel. Here's what your numbers mean:

HDL

the good stuff
Target number: >45

LDL

the bad stuff
Target number: <100



Triglycerides:
the fatty stuff
Target number: <149

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Here's the math.
(Sorry. Yes, there's math.)

HDL
+ LDL
+ (Triglycerides \div 5)

Your total cholesterol

Target number: <200 mg/dL

	my numbers	target numbers
Total cholesterol		<200
HDL: the good stuff		\geq 45
LDL: the bad stuff		<100
Triglycerides: the fatty stuff		<149

Welcome to a not-so-exclusive club.

Chances are, if you're reading this, you're among the 38% of the adult population in the U.S. with high cholesterol. That increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart disease.

The good news is that there are prescription drugs, known as statins, that can be extremely effective at bringing your cholesterol back to healthier levels.

This brief guide gives you an overview of what statins do and why they may be a good option for you.



Enter statins

Statins — including Lipitor, Zocor, Pravachol, and others — are a type of drug that lowers bad cholesterol levels in your bloodstream.

Statins are safe, effective, and widely prescribed. But there are some considerations you should be aware of and should discuss with your health care provider:

- **Different statin brands aren't interchangeable.** Your doctor may have to change your prescription to find the one that works best for you.
- **There can be side effects.** Some statin users have reported muscle pain, nausea, dizziness, flushing, and drowsiness. (In rare cases, some have claimed memory loss, but this has never been scientifically linked to statins.*)
- **You're in it for the long haul.** To get the full benefit, you'll have to continue taking your statin until you're told otherwise by your doctor.
- **Statins alone don't do the whole job.** Your doctor may prescribe other medications to boost good cholesterol or reduce triglycerides.
- **You may need some lifestyle changes.** By sticking to a diet low in unhealthy fats and getting active, you can make your statin work even better.

*A recent study in Australia suggests statins may actually prevent memory loss. See *The Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, Volume 74, Issue 21, 26 November 2019.

