

# Statins

Information and advice for patients

## *Vascular*

### **What are statins?**

Statins are a group of tablets which reduce the amount of cholesterol (a fatty substance) in the blood. If you have too much cholesterol in your blood it can build up on the walls of your arteries, causing them to become narrowed; this is called atherosclerosis. A high level of cholesterol in your blood also increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

The different statins are: simvastatin, pravastatin, atorvastatin, rosuvastatin and fluvastatin.

### **What is the benefit of taking statins?**

The benefit of taking statins is that they reduce the amount of cholesterol in your blood because they block the action of the chemical which makes cholesterol. This helps to reduce atherosclerosis and reduces your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Statins also reduce the risk of circulatory and heart problems in people who have atherosclerosis, even if their cholesterol is normal.

### **What are the risks of taking statins?**

There is a risk you could experience some of the side-effects of statins. Possible side-effects include:

- headache
- pins and needles
- stomach pain
- bloating
- diarrhoea
- nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting
- a rash (this is rare)
- muscle pain, inflammation or weakness

If you experience any of these side-effects while taking statins please see your GP.

There is a risk you could develop severe muscle damage from taking statins, however this is very rare. If you experience any unexpected muscle pain or weakness it is important to see your GP as soon as possible.

There is also a risk that you could have an allergic reaction to statins, but this is rare.

### **What are the risks of not taking statins?**

If you choose not to take statins your risk of having a heart attack or stroke will not be reduced.

### **Are there any alternatives to taking statins?**

An alternative to taking statins is to take another medicine that lowers cholesterol such as ezetimibe or fibrates, however these are not suitable for everyone.

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#### **Before taking statins**

Before taking this medication please let your doctor or nurse know if you have any medical conditions or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should also inform them of any other medications you are taking (particularly ciclosporin, danazol, gemfibrozil, amlodipine and diltiazem) as some types of statins may not be suitable for you.

Please make sure you read the manufacturer's information leaflet that comes with your statins before taking them.

#### **How to take statins**

Your hospital doctor, GP or nurse will tell you how much statin you need to take. Make sure you only use the dose you have been prescribed and that your medication is not past the expiry date.

Your body makes the most cholesterol during the night so it is best to take statins at bedtime. You do not need to take it with food.

You will need to have a blood test shortly after you start taking statins to check the amount of cholesterol in your blood and that your liver is working properly. The amount of statin that you are told to take may change after this test. Your GP will do this blood test again once or twice a year to monitor your cholesterol level and liver function.

You can get a prescription for statins from your GP. You will need to take statins for life, as long as you do not experience any side-effects from taking them.

#### **What happens if I miss a dose?**

If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you do not remember until the following day, skip the missed dose. Do not take two doses together to make up for a forgotten dose.

#### **Precautions**

Please tell any doctors or nurses treating you that you are taking statins.

If you are taking simvastatin you should avoid drinking grapefruit juice as this increases the level of the medicine in your blood, which can lead to you experiencing side-effects.

#### **Storing statins**

- Store your statins in their original packaging.
- Store them in a dry place, at room temperature and out of direct sunlight.
- Keep statins out of the sight and reach of children.

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### Symptoms to report

Please see your GP if you experience any unexpected muscle pains, cramps, tenderness or weakness while you are taking statins.

### Is there anything else I can do to reduce my risk of having a heart attack or stroke?

Although taking statins will help reduce your risk of having a heart attack and stroke, there are also things that you can do to reduce your risk further:

- If you are overweight or obese lose weight; even a moderate amount of weight-loss will help.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet.
- Take regular exercise.
- If you are a smoker, stop smoking.
- If you have high blood pressure make sure this is treated.
- If you are diabetic make sure your blood sugar is well controlled.

### Further information

If you need more information, experience any side effects or have any concerns about taking statins please speak to your local pharmacist, GP or specialist nurse.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British National Formulary, section 2.12 'Lipid-regulating drugs: Statins', March 2013
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, TA94 'Statins for the prevention of cardiovascular events', January 2006

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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