

Statin Drugs and Exercise



When cheaper statin drugs came on to the market several years ago, making cholesterol-reducing medication more accessible, some doctors worried that this would actually have an adverse effect on their patients' health. It is far easier to pop a pill than it is to exercise or commit to a healthier eating plan. But **exercise, along with being an important first step to reducing cholesterol, is a vital complementary protocol for those people who are taking statins,** according to the National Cholesterol Education Program.

Statins lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels by slowing the production of a cholesterol-producing enzyme in our bodies. However, getting your cholesterol on track is a 2-part process—not only do you want to lower the bad LDL levels but you also want to raise your “good” HDL cholesterol. While statin drugs do have a moderate impact on HDL, adding exercise can do more. Studies show that engaging in 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, 5 to 7 days a week, can increase HDL cholesterol by 5–10% in some people. In addition, changing your diet and engaging in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise daily can result in weight loss, which will further lower LDL and can even cause plaque in arteries to shrink.

One of the most worrisome side effects of statin drugs, however, is muscle weakness, which can lead to permanent muscle damage. People who exercise may notice muscle changes far quicker than those leading a sedentary lifestyle. Catching this side effect early on can prevent further damage.

While the ultimate goal of lowering cholesterol through statins is to prevent heart disease and stroke, **exercise can affect other factors that lead to heart disease, such as triglyceride levels, blood pressure, diabetes and obesity,** which statins cannot touch. If you must take statins, getting into better shape could lower your cholesterol enough to allow you to take less potent forms of the drug, thus minimizing side effects. See us for an exercise regimen to lower your cholesterol and keep you healthy.