

Statins stop hepatitis C virus replication

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Japanese scientists say they've found statins, typically used as anti-cholesterol medications, can inhibit the replication of the hepatitis C virus.

The findings mean statins might be able to replace ribavirin in combination therapy with interferon. There are 170 million people worldwide infected with HCV.

The standard HCV treatment is a combination therapy of interferon and ribavirin, which is effective in about 55 percent of patients. The remaining 45 percent face a threat of the disease progressing to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Aware of recent studies showing one statin, lovastatin, inhibits HCV replication, researchers led by Masanori Ikeda of Okayama University tested other statins in search of a more effective anti-HCV therapy.

They evaluated the anti-HCV activities of five statins: atorvastatin, fluvastatin, lovastatin, pravastatin and simvastatin. When the statins were tested alone, all except pravastatin inhibited HCV replication, with fluvastatin having the strongest effect; atorvastatin and simvastatin had moderate effects and lovastatin had a weak effect.

The findings are reported in the July issue of the journal *Hepatology*.

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