

Life-saving statin drugs save healthcare systems money, study finds

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Statin drugs not only help save lives but are great value for money too, even in lower risk patients, according to a new study.

The cholesterol-lowering drugs are widely prescribed to people who have had heart attacks or strokes. They can also help prevent these events happening in people who have not previously developed cardiovascular disease. The NHS estimates that statins save 7,000 lives in the UK annually.

Some critics have urged caution in the use of statins in people who are otherwise healthy and have questioned whether it is worth the expense.

However, the latest study from the Robertson Centre for Biostatistics at the University of Glasgow shows clear health and financial advantages.

Dr Alex McConnachie, lead author, said: "Treating relatively healthy, middle-aged men with statins reduced the number of [hospital admissions](#) due to [heart disease](#) and stroke, leading to better quality of life for the men in the study, and [saving money](#) for the NHS. Treatment of even younger people at lower risk of future heart disease is likely to be cost-effective too."

The study, published in the *European Heart Journal*, used NHS statistics to follow 6,595 men from the west of Scotland who were aged 45-64 years at the start of the study and had high levels of cholesterol but no history of a [heart attack](#). Half were given the drug [pravastatin](#) over five

years and all the men were followed up for at least 15 years. This is the first time the cost-effectiveness of statins has been assessed in this way.

The results showed that for every 1,000 patients who received a 40mg dose of the drug once a day for five years, the NHS saved £710,000, after taking into account the cost of the drug and safety monitoring.

There were also 163 fewer admissions saving 1,836 days in hospital, with fewer admissions for heart attacks, stroke and coronary operations and a 43% reduction in [heart failure](#) admissions to hospital, all over a 15 year period.

Dr Andrew Walker, Health Economist at the Robertson Centre, said: "The results from this study are clear: treatment with a statin in middle age saves lives and frees up NHS beds for other patients."

Prof Naveed Sattar, Professor of Metabolic Medicine at the Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences, said: "These carefully determined results suggest that generic statins are highly cost-effective in primary prevention setting. More importantly, statin benefits and cost effectiveness appear to extend to individuals at risk levels far lower than currently recommended thresholds for treatment in many countries. This observation has important implications for future cardiovascular risk guidelines."

Professor Chris Packard, Director of Research and Development (R&D) at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, said: "The results are particularly striking given the fact that the benefits were seen over 15 years despite treatment only for 5 years."

The results were obtained using Scotland's excellent system for linking electronic health records.

Professor Ian Ford, senior author of the research, added: "The results add to support for a recent call for the expanded use of statins. They also add further evidence of the enormous value to healthcare research of Scotland's health record linkage capabilities."

The paper is titled 'Long-term impact on healthcare resources utilisation of statin treatment, and its costs effectiveness in the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease: a record linkage study.'

Provided by University of Glasgow

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