

Cholesterol drugs' benefits far outweigh side effects, review finds

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But long-term use of statins may raise odds of diabetes among people with risk factors, experts say

(HealthDay)—The benefits of long-term use of cholesterol-lowering statin drugs greatly outweigh the risks, according to a review of research published over 20 years.

Some experts fear that statins may be overused, but these new findings could offer reassurance to the more than 200 million people worldwide who take the drugs, the review authors said. Common [statin](#) medications include Crestor, Lipitor and Zocor.

"For most at-risk patients, the cardiovascular benefits far exceed the risks," study author Dr. Chintan Desai, a clinical cardiology fellow at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, said in a Hopkins news release.

They analyzed data from studies conducted since 1994 that included more than 150,000 middle-aged and elderly men and women who took statins and were followed for about five years. The results showed that long-term statin use slightly increased the risk of some side effects but did not increase the risk for others.

For example, there was little evidence of muscle aches and pains and only a slight increase in the risk of [muscle inflammation](#). A serious condition featuring the rapid breakdown of [muscle tissue](#) was mainly associated with high doses of statins that are no longer recommended.

Long-term use of statins was associated with a modest increase in the risk of type 2 diabetes, but only among people who had other diabetes risk factors. People who took statins for a long time had low increased risk for dementia, blood clots, cataracts and fatigue.

The researchers also found that statin use offered some protection for people at risk for inflammation of the pancreas and for kidney disease caused by the dye used for some medical imaging procedures.

The study was published July 31 in the *British Medical Journal*.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about [statins](#).

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