

Taking statins? Don't worry about memory loss, study finds

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Cholesterol-lowering statin drugs most likely do not cause short-term memory loss, according to a Rutgers University and University of Pennsylvania study of nearly one million patients - contrary to prior assertions.

Limited previous studies and some statin-[drug](#) takers have anecdotally

reported memory lapses after taking popular lipid-lowering drugs (LLDs) called statins, said Brian L. Strom, chancellor of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) and lead study author. The result has been that some people have stopped taking their statins, inappropriately, Strom said.

About 610,000 people die of heart disease in the United States every year - that's 1 in every 4 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control. One in four Americans over age 45 take statins, drugs that inhibit a liver enzyme that controls the synthesis of cholesterol and lowers LDL, commonly known as "bad cholesterol." Statins have proven very effective at lowering [high cholesterol](#), one of the major risk factors for heart disease, and preventing heart attacks and deaths. If a [statin drug](#) alone is not effectively reducing cholesterol numbers or a patient doesn't tolerate the drug, nonstatins are often prescribed, Strom said.

The study, published today in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, compared new users of statins with people not taking statins. New statin users also were compared to a second control group - patients taking nonstatin LLDs - which had not been done before.

More patients taking statins indeed reported [memory loss](#) in the 30-day period after first taking the drugs, compared to non-users, the study found. The same, however, was found with the nonstatin LLDs. "Either it means that anything that lowers cholesterol has the same effect on short-term memory, which is not scientifically credible because you're dealing with drugs with completely different structures," Strom said. Or, he said, "detection bias" is more likely the reason, meaning patients taking a new drug visit their doctors more frequently and are highly attuned to their health.

"When patients are put on statins or any new drug, they're seen more often by their doctor, or they themselves are paying attention to whether

anything is wrong," Strom said. "So if they have a memory problem, they're going to notice it.

Even if it has nothing to do with the drug, they're going to blame it on the drug."

Other studies have already confirmed that statins improve long-term memory, so Strom said the findings indicate short-term memory loss is not a concern either: "You shouldn't worry about short-term memory problems from any statins and, long-term, we know they improve memory."

The upshot: "People who have high [cholesterol](#) should be on [statins](#)," Strom said. Statins include atorvastatin, cerivastatin, fluvastatin, pravastatin and simvastatin, while nonstatin LLDs include cholestyramine, colestipol hydrochloride, colessevelam, clofibrate and gemfibrozil.

"This is a very effective therapy, which is very safe," Strom said. "No drug is completely safe. But it has an opportunity to dramatically reduce [heart disease](#) in the country. People shouldn't steer away from the drug because of false fear of [memory](#) problems."

The study, "Statin Therapy and Risk of Acute Memory Impairment," compared 482,542 individuals taking statin medications to 482,543 randomly selected individuals not taking any LLDs. The second [control group](#) included 26,484 users of nonstatin LLDs.

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