

Women with heart disease are less likely to receive life-saving drugs than men, researchers find

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Women with heart disease are less often treated with cholesterol-

lowering drugs than men, according to research presented today at [ESC Preventive Cardiology 2024](#), a scientific congress of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC).

"Cholesterol-lowering drugs save lives and prevent heart attacks, and should be prescribed to all patients with [coronary artery disease](#)," said study author Dr. Nina Johnston of Uppsala University, Sweden.

"Unfortunately, our study shows that women are missing out on these essential medications."

Patients with coronary artery disease, also called chronic coronary syndrome, require medication to alleviate symptoms and prevent heart attacks and death. ESC guidelines recommend statins for all patients to lower [cholesterol levels](#) in the blood. If levels are not sufficiently lowered with the maximum tolerated dose of statin, then patients should receive a statin plus another cholesterol-lowering drug called ezetimibe. The recommendations are the same for women and men.

Despite having the same recommendations for [treatment](#) and for target levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL; "bad") cholesterol, previous studies have shown that women are less likely to meet target levels than men. This study examined whether women and men receive the same treatments.

This was a retrospective observational study that included 1,037 men and 415 women with a chronic coronary syndrome diagnosed between 2012 and 2020, and who had never had a heart attack. The [median age](#) was 68 years in men and 70 years in women. Electronic health records were used to obtain data on cholesterol levels. Information on dispensed medications was obtained from the Swedish National Prescribed Drug Registry.

Participants were followed up for three years following their diagnosis. The researchers found that at the end of the third year of follow-up, just 54% of women had been treated with cholesterol-lowering drugs, compared with 74% of men. Additionally, 5% of women had been treated with statin plus ezetimibe, compared with 8% of men. Factors that may explain the observed sex differences are under further investigation by the research group.

The researchers also examined treatments and cholesterol levels of women and men diagnosed with a chronic coronary syndrome at different ages (less than 60, 60 to 69.9, 70-79.9, 80 years or older). In all age groups, prescription of cholesterol-lowering treatment was highest at diagnosis and declined over the following three years. This decline in treatment over time was steeper in women than in men. For example, in [patients](#) under 60 years of age, 65% of women and 79% of men had been treated with cholesterol-lowering treatment the week after diagnosis, compared with 52% of women and 78% of men three years later. Achievement of LDL cholesterol targets was also lower in women than men.

Dr. Johnston said, "Our findings should be a wake-up call about the undertreatment of women with heart disease. Equal prescribing practices are needed so that women receive all recommended therapies and are protected from adverse outcomes."

Contrary to common belief, cardiovascular disease kills more women than men, accounting for 45% of all deaths in [women](#), which is more than all cancers combined in the 57 ESC member countries.

More information: The abstract "Lipid-lowering treatment pattern in chronic coronary syndrome—lower proportion of treatment observed among women during 3 years of follow-up" will be presented during the session "Lipid management in different populations," which takes place

on 25 April 2024. esc365.escardio.org/preventive-cardiology/schedule

Provided by European Society of Cardiology

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