

Mayo Clinic Minute: Statins plus lifestyle equals healthy life

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Statins are medications that reduce your risk of a heart attack and stroke by lowering your cholesterol. Dr. Stephen Kopecky, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist, says people should combine statins with a heart-healthy lifestyle to get the most benefit.

"If you take a statin and lower your numbers, but you don't have a

[healthy lifestyle](#), a [healthy diet](#) and food pattern, then you don't get the benefit of the statin," says Dr. Kopecky.

How can that be? Dr. Kopecky explains that some people ask to be put on a statin so they can eat what they want.

"It doesn't work that way," says Dr. Kopecky. "When you take a statin, your numbers look better, your LDL ([low-density lipoprotein](#), or "bad" cholesterol) looks better, but your cardiac events don't reduce."

That's because statins, while important and effective, are just one part of the whole heart-healthy picture. When you combine a statin with regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling stress, not smoking and eating foods based on the Mediterranean diet, you can improve your heart health.

"A pill doesn't take the place of a healthy lifestyle. It has to be in addition to it," says Dr. Kopecky.

Dr. Kopecky says that if you work in [lifestyle changes](#) slowly over time, you'll be on your way to better heart health.

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