



## Lowering LDL numbers a step toward good health



One of the “10 Keys” to Healthy Aging is lowering the Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol level to below 100. Lowering LDL is an important step in preventing heart attacks and stroke. For some older individuals, their doctor will recommend reduction of LDL cholesterol to as low as 70.

There has been concern recently about the benefits of drug therapy to lower blood cholesterol levels. Past research studies have evaluated the amount and type of drug therapy. These studies did not explore the benefits of lipid lowering drug therapy as compared to no drug therapy.

There is overwhelming evidence that lipid lowering drug therapy will reduce the risk of both heart attacks and strokes among older individuals. Medications that lower cholesterol are effective even in individuals over 80 years of age — for both men and women with or without a prior heart attack. Researchers have now shown that practically all men over 60 to 65 years of age and women over 70 have significant, undetected disease in their arteries and other blood vessels. This disease, called atherosclerosis, is often silent until it leads to heart attack or stroke. Lowering blood LDL cholesterol is a very important way of slowing the progression of disease and changing the disease in arteries that can prevent a heart attack or stroke or peripheral vascular disease in the legs.

Not all heart attacks will be preventable but the risks will be greatly reduced. Statins also reduce the risk of a second heart attack. The cost of drug therapy is lower now because of the availability of generic statin drugs. There are some side effects to taking statin drugs that your doctor will

discuss with you. They are also listed on the drug label. Severe side effects are rare.

Unfortunately at older ages, diet changes alone are unlikely to lower your LDL cholesterol enough to reduce risk of heart attack. Many individuals stop taking their drugs because they do not “feel sick” or did not want to pay for the drugs or believe that certain symptoms are caused by the statin drugs. Their blood LDL cholesterol level will then increase and their risk of heart attack or stroke will increase.

If you are having financial difficulty paying for your statin therapy, talk to your physician about lower cost generic statin drugs or alternative payment plans.

Taking statin drugs is very effective to prevent both first and recurrent heart attacks and strokes. They work only when swallowed and not in the bottle or the shelf. Remember, the disease in your arteries may be silent until you have a “sudden” heart attack or stroke. Treatment of heart disease is very expensive. Prevention can reduce those costs.

Take care of your arteries, work on lowering your LDL and living a “Healthier Tomorrow.”

*This column was written by Lewis H. Kuller, MD, DrPH, co-principal investigator for the Center for Healthy Aging. For more information on this article, please call 412-624-3217.*

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