



WEST YORKSHIRE HEALTHY HEARTS PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For switch of statin medication

1. What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in your blood. If you have too much cholesterol in your blood, it can increase your risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke. If you have been prescribed statins is to help you lower your cholesterol levels. Statins can reduce this risk by a third if taken properly and at the right dose.

Cholesterol is carried in your blood by proteins. When the two combines, they're called lipoproteins.

The two main types of lipoprotein are:

- **high-density lipoprotein (HDL)** carries cholesterol away from the cells and back to the liver, where it's broken down or passed out of the body as a waste product. For this reason, HDL is referred to as good cholesterol, and higher levels are better.
- **low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** carries cholesterol to the cells that need it, but if there's too much cholesterol for the cells to use, it can build up in the artery walls, leading to disease of the arteries. For this reason, LDL is known as bad cholesterol.

The amount of cholesterol in the blood (both HDL and LDL) can be measured with a blood test.

2. What else can I do to lower my cholesterol?

You can also lower your cholesterol by:

- eating a healthy, balanced diet
- maintaining a healthy weight, BMI and waist circumference
- doing regular physical activity

3. Is there an ideal target for my cholesterol?

There are several recommendations on the optimal cholesterol levels, and this can cause confusion and concern to people if they do not achieve targets. Ideally total cholesterol should be less than 4mmol/L. However, the most important thing to monitor when you are prescribed a statin is that you are taking it and your high level of cholesterol is decreasing. A big cause of patients not having a reduction in their cholesterol levels is often not remembering to take their statin medication regularly, or not taking it at all. Statins work best if taken long term.

For further information on cholesterol levels see

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-cholesterol/cholesterol-levels/>



4. What are the side effects of the new statin medication?

Like all medication, statins have potential side effects. The most common are muscular aches and pains, but many people experience none.

A research study suggested that in very rare cases statins may increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes, but still resulted in clear overall benefit by reducing the risk of heart attacks and strokes. However, statins are among the safest and the most studied medications available today. If you do experience side effects, or if your side effects change or become worse, tell your GP.

Statin target the liver cells where cholesterol is made. Before you start taking statins, you might have a blood test to check how well your liver works. Your doctor may request that you have a follow-up blood test a few months later. If your liver is affected, your doctor may want to reduce your dose or change your statin to another kind of medication that lowers your cholesterol.

5. I am already on lots of medication, how statin will affect the other medication I take?

Your doctor has already checked the records carefully for a list of prescribed medications which can interact significantly with statins and you are not on any of these. If you have any concerns, please speak to your pharmacist in the first instance and if necessary, afterwards you may be directed to speak to your GP or practice nurse.

6. Where can I find out more information?

You can find out more information about statins and why it is important to lower bad cholesterol on the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Healthy Hearts website <https://www.westyorkshireandharrogatehealthyhearts.co.uk/> that also includes links to other useful sources such NHS Choices, Heart UK, Blood Pressure UK, British Heart Foundation etc.

The website provides some useful information and details on healthy lifestyle including tips on exercise and healthy eating.

You can also talk to your pharmacist, practice nurse or GP if there are questions about statins and healthy lifestyle.

Your local pharmacy can provide some useful information about what statins are and answer any basic questions. You can find details of your local community pharmacies on the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Healthy Hearts website or in the Yellow Pages.

7. Why are you suggesting Atorvastatin is more effective compared to the current statin medication I am on now?

There is strong evidence supported by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the European Society of Cardiologists that Atorvastatin is a more effective medication to help lower cholesterol.

8. I forgot to take my statin, is this a problem?



Statins should be taken every day to get the benefit – however, if you have forgotten to take your medication for a day or any length of time, don't worry, start taking it again and speak to a healthcare professional who will be able to offer some advice.

9. Do I have to avoid certain foods if I am on a statin?

You can check the patient information leaflets that is supplied with your medications. If you have further questions, you can check with your pharmacist. If you're taking simvastatin, avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice as they can increase your risk of side effects. If you're taking atorvastatin, the occasional glass of grapefruit juice is thought to be fine, but large amounts are best avoided (more than 1.2 litres per day).

Currently, healthcare professionals advise it is safe to drink grapefruit juice and eat grapefruit if you're taking other types of statins.