

## STATINS: Good for Heart, Bad for Joints?

If you are taking a cholesterol-lowering drug, chances are your heart may be protected, but your hip joint may not be. A recent study shows that the statin drugs, a class that includes Lipitor, Pravachol and Zocor, may nearly double the risk of developing hip osteoarthritis (OA) in women older than 65.

In the study of 5,674 women by researchers at the University of California in San Francisco, 745 women showed X-ray evidence of OA. After eight years, the researchers found a 92% increase in the risk of developing hip OA in the women who had been taking statin drugs. Of women already had OA, however, the statin drugs were not associated with making the disease worse.

If lifestyle modifications, such as eating right and getting regular exercise, didn't succeed in lowering lipid levels, statin medications are the first-line drug of choice for this purpose, but they are not the only choice, says John H. Stone, MD, associate professor medicine, division of rheumatology and director of the Johns Hopkins Vasculitis Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

"Fibrate drugs, such as gemfibrozil (Lopid), can boost "good" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and improve the overall cholesterol ratio. The drug ezetimibe (Zetia) keeps the body from absorbing cholesterol, and the prescription forms of niacin, a B vitamin, can decrease "bad" low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, increase HDL and decrease triglycerides," says Dr. Stone.

Reprinted from Arthritis Today, September-October 2005