



American Heart Association.
Reduce Your Risk™

Cholesterol-Lowering Medications Discussion Guide



High LDL (bad) cholesterol can cause fat deposits that clog your arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. A healthy diet and exercise help, but sometimes medication is needed too.



Before prescribing medication, your doctor may calculate your Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease (ASCVD) risk.

Based on your age* and ASCVD risk, your doctor may recommend a cholesterol-lowering medication**if:

- You're 19 or younger and have Familial Hypercholesterolemia (FH)
- You're 20-39 with family history of early ASCVD and LDL of 160 mg/dL or higher
- You're 40-75 and have diabetes and LDL between 70 to 190 mg/dL
- *If you're 75 years or older, your doctor will have a risk discussion with you
- **Regardless of age, if your LDL is 190 mg/dL or higher, your doctor will recommend medication

Before starting any new medications,

tell your doctor about all medications, supplements, and herbal products you take, as interactions can cause serious side effects.

Always follow your doctor's instructions and report any side effects. Don't stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor.

Learn more about the most common [cholesterol-lowering medications](#).



Questions for Your Doctor

- What should my LDL cholesterol number be based on my risk factors and treatment plan?
- What lifestyle changes and medications can help lower my LDL and heart disease risk?
- What side effects should I be aware of?
- How long will I need to take this cholesterol-lowering medication?
- How often should I check my cholesterol numbers while taking medications?
- When should I schedule my next appointment to check if the medication is working?

What are some potential side effects of cholesterol-lowering medications?

Your doctor will work with you to decide which medication, or combination of medications, is best for you. Cholesterol-lowering medications can cause mild side effects, like:



- Muscle aches or weakness: Statins, PCSK9 inhibitors, fibrates, niacin
- Headache, drowsiness, dizziness: Statins, ezetimibe, fibrates, niacin
- Diarrhea or constipation: Bile acid sequestrants
- Abdominal pain, cramps, bloating, or gas: Statins, fibrates
- Nausea and vomiting: Statins, fibrates
- Sleep problems: Statins



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