

## Cholesterol-lowering medicines

Medicines such as statins can lower your cholesterol levels and help to reduce your risk of heart attacks and strokes. These medicines are especially recommended for people who already have signs of heart disease (angina or heart attacks) or have had a stroke or mini stroke (also called a transient ischaemic attack, or TIA). Statins are well proven to reduce the chance of having another heart attack or stroke for these people, even if their cholesterol level was normal all along.



Like all medicines, statins have a risk of side effects, though most people take them without having problems. If you are at moderate or high risk of heart attacks or strokes you are more likely to be better off taking a statin than not taking one.

Nearly all of the side effects from statins are temporary. They usually settle if you reduce the dose and then slowly increase it again, or if you stop taking them on advice from your doctor. If you think you have a side effect, or are worried about getting one, then talk to your doctor before stopping your statin medicine. To read about some of the risks and benefits of statins go to [www.heartfoundation.org.nz](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz) and search for “statins”.

If you're a man aged 35 or older, or a woman aged 45 or older, talk to your doctor or nurse about having a heart check to find out what your risk is. A heart check is sometimes called a cardiovascular risk assessment (or CVRA or CVR). The heart check calculates your risk of having a heart attack or stroke within the next five years compared to the general population. Your risk is given as a percentage. 1 to 5% is a low risk, 5 to 15% is a medium risk, and above 15% is thought to be a higher risk.

Your doctor may talk with you about the risks and benefits of starting cholesterol-lowering drugs, so you decide together whether to use them or not. For people who have a 5 to 15% risk of a heart attack, it's often not clear which treatment is best. For people at high risk (above 15%) the benefits of treatment usually outweigh the risks.

No matter what your risk, your doctor will probably advise you to make some lifestyle changes.

 *HealthInfo recommends the following pages*

- Heart Foundation – My heart pills ([www.heartfoundation.org.nz/your-heart/heart-treatments/medications](http://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/your-heart/heart-treatments/medications))

Information on the different types of drugs for heart conditions, what they do and any side effects they have.

*Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed September 2018. Last updated May 2019.*