

Statins for Primary Prevention: What You Need to Know



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What are statins?

Statins are medicines that help lower the level of cholesterol in your blood. High cholesterol can lead to fatty deposits building up in your blood vessels, increasing your risk of heart attacks and strokes.

What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention means taking steps to reduce your risk of developing a disease before you've had any symptoms. If you're taking statins for primary prevention, it means you haven't had a heart attack or stroke, but your overall risk of having one in the future is high enough that a statin is recommended.

Why have I been offered a statin?

You've been offered a statin because your overall risk of developing cardiovascular disease (like a heart attack or stroke) in the next 10 years is higher than average. This risk is based on factors like your age, blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking status, and medical history.

Even if your cholesterol level isn't very high, a statin can still help reduce your risk.



How do statins work?

Statins lower your “bad” cholesterol (LDL cholesterol) and may slightly raise your “good” cholesterol (HDL cholesterol). This helps prevent the buildup of fatty plaques in your arteries.

What should I expect after starting a statin?

You won't feel any different, but over time, the medicine reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Side effects are uncommon. Most people tolerate statins well. Some may experience mild muscle aches or digestive issues. Rarely, people can develop more serious side effects — if you notice unexplained muscle pain, weakness, or dark urine, speak to your doctor straight away.

Do I need regular cholesterol tests?

No.

Once you've started a statin, we don't need to routinely monitor your cholesterol levels.

This is based on the latest clinical guidance, which shows that checking cholesterol levels regularly doesn't change how well statins work or improve health outcomes.

Instead, we focus on whether you are tolerating the statin well and whether you're happy to continue taking it long-term.

You will need a one off check of liver blood test after three months to make sure the medication is agreeing with you.

Do I need to do anything else?

Yes – statins are just one part of looking after your heart health. You can further reduce your risk by:

- Not smoking
- Eating a balanced diet (low in saturated fats)
- Being physically active most days
- Keeping your blood pressure in a healthy range
- Managing diabetes well, if you have it

How long will I need to take a statin?

Statins are usually taken long-term. They only work while you're taking them. If you stop, your risk of heart attack or stroke may rise again.

We'll discuss your treatment regularly during your routine check-ups to make sure it still feels right for you.

Got questions or concerns?

If you're unsure about taking a statin or want to talk through the benefits and risks, please speak to your GP or nurse. We're here to support your decision and help you make the choice that's best for you.

