

Statins help stall Alzheimer's in small study

Last Updated: 2004-11-09 11:43:33 -0400 (Reuters Health) NEW ORLEANS (Reuters) –

Cholesterol-lowering statins, a popular class of drugs that includes Pfizer Inc.'s Lipitor, may slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease, according to results from a small study presented on Tuesday.

In the study, patients taking Lipitor in addition to standard therapy for Alzheimer's were more likely to remain stable, while most of those on a placebo suffered a deterioration in brain function and a worsening of depression. The study, which included **46 patients**, was presented at the American Heart Association's annual meeting in New Orleans. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive and irreversible deterioration in memory, believed to be caused by a build-up of toxic plaque in the brain. Victims tend to have excess cholesterol build-up in the brain, promoting the production of toxins. Patients in the study had mild to moderate Alzheimer's, averaged 78 years old and were tracked for a year. They took the statin or placebo in addition to the conventional therapy for Alzheimer's, drugs called cholinesterase inhibitors. "At a minimum we've delayed their entrance into a nursing home," said Larry Sparks, senior scientist at the Roberts Laboratory for Neurodegenerative Disease Research in Arizona, and a lead study author. "This may prove that two drugs work better than one alone." Fifty-three percent of those on Lipitor improved or stabilized, compared to 28 percent of those on the placebo. Scores on a cognitive test on average remained stable for those on Lipitor, versus a decline among those getting the placebo. Pfizer is among those now conducting larger human trials to further test the hypothesis that reducing cholesterol can stall the progression of Alzheimer's, Sparks said. Statins are taken by an estimated 13 million Americans and include AstraZeneca Plc's Crestor and Merck & Co.'s Zocor, in addition to Lipitor.

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Dr. Sears' Comments:

Any approach that reduces inflammation will decrease the likelihood of Alzheimer's. This is why high-dose fish oil and the Zone Diet work synergistically to maintain cognitive function.

Cholesterol drugs may not reduce risk of dementia

Last Updated: **2004-11-12** 10:51:09 -0400 (Reuters Health) NEW YORK (Reuters Health) –

New study findings suggest that the cholesterol-lowering drugs know as "statins" do not appear to lower the risk of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, except possibly in cases of early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

This runs counter to recent reports indicating that these drugs do, in fact, reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. **The authors** of the current study, reported in the November 9th issue of the medical journal Neurology, **believe the discrepancy may have to do with how the data were analyzed.** Dr. Gail Li, from the University of Washington in Seattle, and colleagues assessed the outcomes of 2,356 elderly subjects without dementia who were in a health maintenance organization. The subjects were enrolled in the study between 1994 and 1996 and were evaluated every two years until the end of 2002. During follow-up, **312 subjects were diagnosed with all-cause dementia and 168 with probable Alzheimer's disease.** As noted, statin use did not have a significant effect on the risk of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Moreover, there was no evidence that higher or lower doses of statin affected the development of dementia. However, statin use was linked with a lower risk of "probable" Alzheimer's disease in subjects younger than 80 years who also had a least one copy of

APOE E4, a gene mutation associated with increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. But this relationship was not strong. "Our results argue against the general premise that statins used for prevention of coronary heart disease will result in prevention of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, except perhaps in subgroups at high risk for early-onset Alzheimer's disease or in persons starting statins at a younger age and taking them for longer periods of time," Li's team concludes.

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Dr. Sears' Comments:

This report makes perfect sense since **statins cannot cross the blood-brain barrier**. On the other hand, **fish oils can and therefore exert their anti-inflammatory actions inside the central nervous system**. This is why data on the use of high-dose fish oil is uniformly positive in reducing the incidence of Alzheimer's.