



Mark A. Stengler, NMD

STATIN CRAZY

Don't Be Duped by Their Newest "Benefit" Find Out How To Reduce Inflammation Naturally

Statins have gotten a lot of press lately. Researchers made headlines when they found that *rosuvastatin* (Crestor), a cholesterol-lowering drug, reduced the risk for heart attack and stroke in people who had normal cholesterol and high levels of *C-reactive protein* (CRP), a sign of inflammation. The recent JUPITER trial (which stands for Justification for the Use of Statins in Primary Prevention: An Intervention Trial Evaluating Rosuvastatin) was lauded as a breakthrough. The findings were found to be so positive that the trial was cut short—to allow even the placebo group to receive the purported cardiovascular benefits of the drug. We are accustomed to thinking about statins in terms of lowering cholesterol, but this study caused some cardiologists to think statins—already a best-selling class of drugs—should be prescribed even more widely.

Ready to get a prescription? Hold on. In my opinion, the researchers duped other doctors and their patients. In terms of statistics, Crestor did reduce the risk for a heart attack or stroke by half, but in terms of real-world risk, only one person out of 120 actually would benefit from the drug as the trial indicated. Worse, 25% more patients taking Crestor developed type 2 diabetes

compared with the placebo group, a fact that was not widely reported.

If there is anything useful resulting from this study, it is that mainstream medicine recognized the importance of CRP and the role of inflammation in heart disease. This is a topic that holistic physicians have been talking about for years. I wrote about inflammation and heart disease in the very first issue of *Bottom Line Natural Healing* back in 2005.

Statins may reduce symptoms of heart disease by lowering cholesterol and inflammation, but they do not address the source of the inflammation, as natural therapies do. Although statins have a place in the conventional treatment of patients, including those with a history of heart attack or very high CRP levels, they are expensive—costing hundreds of dollars a year—and can cause serious side effects, such as muscle pain and damage, fatigue, liver and kidney damage, diabetes and memory impairment. They may even increase cancer risk. *Important:* Most of us can lower CRP levels naturally by losing weight if we need to and exercising if we don't already do so. But perhaps the most powerful factor influencing inflammation is what we eat. We also can supplement with specific nutrients to further reduce inflammation.

THE INFLAMMATION CONNECTION

About 10 years ago, Harvard University physicians demonstrated that chronic low-grade inflammation throughout the body could damage blood vessels and was a better indicator of risk for cardiovascular disease than cholesterol. The researchers developed a laboratory test for CRP to measure low-grade inflammation in the body.

An elevated CRP level doesn't just affect the heart. It hurts the whole body. Several years ago, a health author whom I know and respect, Jack Challem, wrote *The Inflammation Syndrome*. He described how “every disease, every ache and every pain...revolves around inflammation...” and how many inflammatory diseases are related to one another. For example, having periodontal disease (which inflames the gums) or rheumatoid arthritis or psoriasis increases heart disease risk. Similarly, being overweight or having type 2 diabetes increases CRP levels and heart disease risk.

DIET COMES FIRST

To reduce inflammation, it's best to start with what you eat. Your body makes both inflammation-promoting and inflammation-fighting substances called *eicosanoids*, compounds derived mostly from the fats you eat. Consuming a lot of sweets and unhealthy oils, such as corn, safflower and soybean oils, and trans fats found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils ramps up the body's

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inflammatory eicosanoids. In other words, junk food increases inflammation.

However, if you consume fish (the best choices are cold-water types, including salmon, trout and sardines), free-range meats and health-promoting cooking oils (such as extra-virgin olive oil, macadamia nut oil and avocado oil), you can increase your body's production of anti-inflammatory eicosanoids. Eating a lot of vegetables, such as romaine lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower, and fruits, such as blueberries, raspberries and kiwifruit, also helps maintain normal CRP levels. These foods are high in fiber and rich in antioxidants, nutrients that neutralize harmful molecules called free radicals.

Make sure that the vast majority of foods you eat are fresh—*not* out of a box, can or jar. You'll be avoiding packaged foods, most of which have been adulterated with added sugars, salt, refined carbohydrates and unhealthy fats.

SUPPLEMENTS THAT HELP

For many people, healthful eating habits are not enough to lower CRP levels. Some of my patients have greater needs for specific anti-inflammatory nutrients. *First step:* Insist that your doctor measure your CRP level annually. Ask for the high-sensitivity CRP (hsCRP) test, the newest form of the test. It's a simple blood test and relatively inexpensive (about \$25 to \$50). Some insurers will cover the test. See the box on page 2 to determine which of the supplements below are right for you based on your CRP level and how much to take.

Multivitamin. Several studies have found that taking a multivitamin can lead to impressive reductions in CRP. One study conducted at the Cooper Institute in Dallas showed that a daily multivitamin lowered CRP by 14% after six months.

Many individual vitamins, including vitamins C and E, have been shown to reduce CRP. Niacin (a form of vitamin B-3) also lowers CRP. *Important:* While many individual vitamins are beneficial, I recommend a multivitamin because it contains numerous vitamins that can reduce inflammation.

Omega-3 fish oils. The omega-3s form the biochemical basis of some of the body's anti-inflammatory eicosanoids. They benefit cardiovascular health in a number of ways, including mildly thinning the blood, slowing the heart rate, lowering levels of triglycerides and improving blood vessel flexibility. Look for fish oil that contains both *eicosapentaenoic acid* (EPA) and *docosahexaenoic acid* (DHA). *One good choice:* Krill oil, a type of fish oil made from shrimplike crustaceans. Krill oil also contains the antioxidant *astaxanthin*, which also is good for the heart.

Gamma-linolenic acid (GLA). This essential fatty acid in plant oil is the principal anti-inflammatory compound in the omega-6 family of fats. It works by shifting a major part of the omega-6 biochemistry from inflammatory to anti-inflammatory activity. In the process, it increases production of anti-inflammatory eicosanoids. GLA and fish oils are synergistic—they work better together than either on its own.

Curcumin. This extract of the spice turmeric, common in South Asian cuisines, blocks inflammation.

More than 2,000 studies have documented the benefits of curcumin for such inflammatory diseases as rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. It also may prevent cardiac hypertrophy, a type of enlarged heart. Given the anti-inflammatory nature of curcumin, research is likely to uncover more heart-healthy benefits.

Pycnogenol. This proprietary ingredient, extracted from the bark of French maritime pine trees, has powerful anti-inflammatory effects. It has been shown to improve circulation, to work as a mild blood thinner and to reduce the need for angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor drugs that are used to treat high blood pressure and congestive heart failure.

Vitamin D. Half of Americans are deficient in vitamin D. A recent study in *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that men with low vitamin D levels were two and one-half times more likely to die during the next eight years than those with the highest levels.

Red yeast rice extract. This is one of my favorite supplements because it can lower levels of CRP and LDL (bad) cholesterol. It is sold at most health-food stores and contains trace levels of a naturally occurring statin compound. In these small quantities—a fraction of what's in drugs—statins are safe. Studies have found that red yeast rice extract can lower CRP levels by up to 50%. Statins (perhaps even natural ones, such as red yeast rice extract) are known to deplete coenzyme Q10, an antioxidant necessary for heart health. If you take red yeast rice extract, supplement daily with 100 mg of coenzyme Q10. ■ ■