

Statins lower stroke severity, improve recovery

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Mayo Clinic researchers have shown that patients who were taking statins before a stroke experienced better outcomes and recovery than patients who weren't on the drug — even when their cholesterol levels were ideal. The finding is reported in the current issue of the *Journal of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Diseases*.

"We were trying to determine if the daily use of statins had more of an impact on stroke patients than simply lowering their "bad" (low-density lipid) cholesterol," explains lead researcher Latha Stead, M.D. "We already knew statin use improved outcomes in general, so we focused on the patients who had optimal LDL levels and found it still had quite significant value."

Statins or reductase inhibitors are enzymes that are widely used to improve cardiovascular health and, more recently, for certain vascular conditions in the brain. One use has been to lower the level of LDL which can contribute to arterial blockages.

Previous researchers had shown a lower death rate and improved function in strokes when people had used statins. The Mayo team found that statin used in this cohort also decreased the severity of the strokes and significantly improved overall outcomes. The researchers say this shows benefits far beyond lowering lipid levels. Researchers think the specific benefits may include plaque stabilization and improved cell function in vascular walls, as well as anti-inflammatory and antioxidant factors. More research is needed to pinpoint the specific benefits.

Researchers identified 508 patients who were diagnosed with acute ischemic stroke in the emergency department during the 22 months from March 2004 to December 2005. Among that number, 207 had their lipid levels measured within 15 days either side of the stroke incident — and had LDL levels at or below 100 mg/dL, which is considered optimal for healthy individuals. Roughly half the cohort of 207 had been taking statins. Researchers also adjusted for age, gender and stroke severity.

Source: Mayo Clinic

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