

Study finds no link between statins and cancer risk

July 25 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

(Medical Xpress) -- A new study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* reports that, contrary to previous studies, the use of cholesterol reducing statin drugs does not increase the risk of patients developing cancer.

A previous 2008 study was performed during a clinical trial of [heart patients](#) taking the statin Vytorin and showed that there was an increased risk of cancer. However, even the researchers conducting that study believe their results were due simply to chance as other studies have shown no real connection.

This new study, led by Candace Gunnarsson from S2 Statistical Solutions, Inc. looked at the medical records of nearly 92,000 Americans that were available on a national database. Half were patients prescribed statins and half were not. Information was pulled on 45,857 statin patients and matched them to a similar non-statin patient based on factors such as weight, age, [cholesterol levels](#) and medical conditions.

They found that the half who were taking statins were 11.4 percent likely to develop cancer over a five year period compared to 11.1 percent of patients who were not statin users.

With an estimated 50 percent of American men and 40 percent of American women over the age of 65 using statins, this study provides reassurance to many patients who questioned if their use of statins was safe.

Biologically, there is no known reason why statins would promote or increase the risk of cancer. In fact, recent studies are providing early evidence that statins may actually work to treat or help reduce the risk of certain cancers such as [prostate cancer](#).

While the researchers say that more studies could be done to look at specific [statins](#) and their individual risks for certain cancers, they believe the size and scope of their study can finally put to rest the question of a connection between overall statin use and its connection to [cancer risk](#). They believe that patients should be able to feel comfortable should their physician prescribe a statin medication.

More information: Statins and Risk of Cancer, A Retrospective Cohort Analysis of 45,857 Matched Pairs From an Electronic Medical Records Database of 11 Million Adult Americans, *J Am Coll Cardiol*, 2011; 58:530-537, [doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2011.04.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2011.04.015)

Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to determine whether cancer can be attributed to statin use among a general population of older adults in the United States with at least 3 years of follow-up.

Background: Statins are widely prescribed drugs in the United States for the management of dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and cardiovascular event risk reduction. Unsettled scientific debate about the association of statins with cancer continues, with high-profile studies showing conflicting results.

Methods: A retrospective cohort analysis of the incidence of cancer in older adults who have and who have not used statins was performed. More than 11 million analyzable patient records from January 1990 through February 2009 were drawn from the General Electric Centricity electronic medical records database. Propensity matching found pairs of patients receiving and not receiving statin therapy who shared similar propensities for statin use.

Results: Propensity score methods matched 45,857 comparison pairs of patients taking a statin and patients not taking a statin. The average time in the database was 8 years, with pairs being followed for an average of 4.6 and 4.7 years. After matching, the incidence of cancer in patients taking a statin was 11.37% compared with 11.11% in matched patients not taking a statin. Multivariate-matched Cox regression analysis showed a nonsignificant hazard ratio of 1.04 (95% confidence interval: 0.99 to 1.09). Kaplan-Meier curves for diagnosis of any cancer up to 10 years also showed no difference for patients taking a statin and those not taking a statin.

Conclusions: This retrospective analysis of nearly 46,000 propensity-matched pairs demonstrated no statistically significant increased risk of cancer associated with statins.

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