

A Closer Look at Statin Drugs, Cholesterol and Overlooked Risk Factors for Heart Disease - Part 3

By Toni Eatros, MS, Dipl Ac, AP

Over the past two months, I have explained the importance of cholesterol in our body, especially as we age, and have reviewed the actual research regarding mortality rate as it relates to cholesterol levels. I know this information is contrary to the majority of messages about cholesterol that you are encountering on a daily basis. I encourage you to go back and read my past two articles and really think about the information presented there with new eyes. People are misled to believe that if their cholesterol levels are in a normal range they are considered healthy and at a low risk for heart attacks and strokes. If this is true, why do half of the people that suffer heart attacks each year have normal to low cholesterol levels?

The question then becomes, if high cholesterol levels are not the cause of heart disease, then what is/are the cause(s)? The fact is, that inflammation of the artery walls is where heart disease begins. The cholesterol will not clog your arteries unless there is some place for it to attach, like a ridge or rip in the inflamed arterial wall. Heart disease is an inflammatory process and its treatment is more complex than simply taking a statin drug to lower cholesterol levels. When this approach is taken, the inflammatory issues are not addressed. As I mentioned in the previous two articles, cholesterol is not the bad guy, it is absolutely necessary for proper brain function and hormone production. Now, I'm not saying that excessive cholesterol levels are great, but high cholesterol is only one small risk factor in the development of heart disease. Let's look at some of the other risk factors for heart disease that are often overlooked.

Elevated homocysteine levels in the blood damages the wall of the artery and disables a mechanism in the cells of the artery wall, called contact inhibition, that regulates the growth of the smooth muscle cells of the artery. When this happens, these cells can multiply out of control creating a bulge in the artery creating the perfect environment for cholesterol to start adhering to the artery wall. We call this process arteriosclerosis. Too much homocysteine in your blood literally shreds your arteries from the inside out. Now cholesterol will begin adhering to these areas leading to narrowing of the artery and eventually total blockage, followed by heart attack or stroke. Homocysteine levels can be measured through a blood test ordered by your doctor. Although the "normal" range



is 5-15 umol/L of blood, the data shows a level higher than 6.3 umol/L causes a steep progressive risk of heart attack. Optimal homocysteine levels should be around 6.3 umol/L. Treatment of high homocysteine levels is with the use of vitamin therapy, specifically the B vitamins. There is no pharmaceutical or surgical treatment for high homocysteine levels, therefore no money in treating it. Statin drugs used to lower cholesterol, however, are huge money makers.

C-reactive protein is another heart disease risk factor that can be measured in the blood. C-reactive protein levels indicate the amount of inflammation in the arteries. Research shows that people with high levels of C-reactive protein, greater than 1.3 mg/L, are almost three times as likely to die from a heart attack. High levels of C-reactive protein, like high homocysteine levels, can be treated quite effectively using natural therapies such as diet modifications, vitamins, fish oil, garlic and anti-inflammatory herbs.

Insulin resistance, the early stage of type II diabetes, is one of the major causes for elevated cholesterol levels, inflammation of the arteries, and raise blood pressure. Again, this risk factor for heart disease is best managed using natural therapies and lifestyle modifications.

Another important risk factor in heart disease is low thyroid function. Many physicians only look at the TSH level to determine how the thyroid is functioning. However, the "normal" range is quite large (0.40 - 5.50), so levels need to get pretty out of balance before the hypothyroid condition is addressed. The optimal range of TSH is (0.40 - 2.0). This is based on the research that shows that people with TSH levels higher than 4 run a significantly

greater risk of developing heart disease. Vitamin and mineral support can correct thyroid function, but for more severe hypo-functioning, Armour thyroid can be used effectively.

Men have one more risk factor to consider, low free testosterone levels. A low free testosterone level is considered a major risk factor in predicting the severity of artery blockage in men. This study goes on to state that low free testosterone is considered an independent risk factor for heart disease. This means even if you don't have any of the other risk factors discussed above, you would still be at a greater risk for serious cardiovascular disease like stroke or heart attack. Something to consider here, adequate cholesterol levels are required in order for the body to make testosterone. If a man is taking a medication to lower cholesterol levels he may not have enough to make adequate amounts of testosterone, further increasing his risk for heart attack and stroke. Optimal free testosterone levels are 150-210. These ranges can often be achieved using vitamins and herbs.

The next time you go for your annual physical to measure cholesterol levels, ask your doctor to also order homocysteine levels, cardio C-reactive protein, TSH, free T3, free testosterone, fasting glucose and fasting insulin. Now you truly know your risk for cardiovascular disease. If your doctor does not know how to balance these numbers naturally, bring your labs in to Acupuncture & Natural Health Solutions, www.AcupunctureSolutionsOnline.com, and we can formulate an individualized natural treatment plan to lower your risk for heart disease, get you off the statin medication and get you feeling so much better.

ATTENTION VETERANS!!!

Any veteran with a Veterans Choice Insurance Card is now eligible to receive acupuncture benefits locally in SW Florida at Acupuncture & Natural Health Solutions.

Get a referral for acupuncture from your primary physician through the VA. Once approved, veterans can receive acupuncture benefits with no out of pocket cost.

*Yours In Health & Wellness,
Toni L. Eatros, AP*

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