

Monthly Newsletter for Woodlands' CCM Program



Is lowering my cholesterol with medication cheating?

By Mark M. Ryan MD

Cholesterol is a fatty substance also called a lipid, that our livers produce for use in making cell membranes, hormones, bile, and even vitamin D. While the liver is capable of producing all of the cholesterol that our bodies' need, we also consume cholesterol in our diet in meat, dairy, and other fatty foods.

When you have a routine lipid panel drawn, the "normal ranges" of cholesterol have steadily decreased over the past decades.

When I was in medical school in 2001, a [target LDL cholesterol level](#) for a healthy adult was <160 and for a patient with heart disease was <100. Today, the [target](#) for a healthy adult is <100 and <70 for a patient with heart disease.

What changed? The availability, affordability, and efficacy of medication to lower cholesterol thereby lowering risk of stroke and heart attack. In 2001, the annual [cost of Lipitor](#) was \$1,148. Today it is [\\$28](#).

- Yes, it is true that eating more soluble fiber (think fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and seeds) binds cholesterol in the gut and prevents it from even being absorbed

- Yes, it is true that eating foods high in polyunsaturated fats (think walnuts, salmon, and avocados) results in lower LDL cholesterol.
- Yes, it is true that limiting foods high in saturated fat (think red meat, butter, cheese, and fried foods) lowers your cholesterol.
- Yes, it is true that exercising several days a week increases HDL-cholesterol while lowering LDL and triglycerides

In talking with patients, I stress that they should be focusing on doing all of the above lifestyle interventions, but I also tell them that it is not cheating to use medication to further lower your cholesterol.

The number one cause of death and disability among adults in the USA is cardiovascular disease (stroke, heart attack, and heart failure). Lipitor and Crestor have both been proven effective at not only lowering your cholesterol levels, but lowering your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Taking, or at least trying, one of these medications is not cheating but, rather, a very smart way to spend \$28 this day in age.

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>>> IN THE NEWS

Shingrix vaccine is very effective and long-lasting

Shingrix (two-dose shingles vaccine) was approved in 2017 after [showing](#) near-100% efficacy in preventing cases of shingles in clinical trials. A large follow-up [study](#) confirms the effectiveness of the vaccine in the real-world.



In this study, researchers funded by the CDC followed almost 2 million adults above the age of 50 who were receiving care in one of several large U.S. healthcare systems for five years.

During this time period, 50% of the patients had received one dose of Shingrix and 38% received the recommended two doses of the vaccine.

A case of shingles was defined as the specific diagnostic code in the medical record accompanied by a prescription for an antiviral medication. This was a much more relaxed way to diagnose shingles than the original study that used laboratory based PCR testing; nonetheless, patients that received two doses of the vaccine decreased their risk of shingles by 76%. Interestingly, patients who only received one dose of the Shingrix vaccine reduced their risk by 64%.

The efficacy of the two-dose regimen was unchanged even if the interval between doses was greater than the recommended 6 months. The vaccine's protection did not decrease significantly during the five year follow-up period in this study.

“... patients that received two doses of the vaccine decreased their risk of shingles by 76%”



>>> THIS MONTH

FEBRUARY IS American Heart Month



Take the following steps to lower your risk of heart disease:

- Exercise that involves increasing your heart rate 20-30 beats above your baseline for thirty minutes four-to-five days per week
- Limit alcohol consumption to five drinks a week
- Work to quit smoking cigarettes or at least reduce use
- Use diet, exercise, stress reduction, and medication as needed to achieve an average blood pressure of <130/90 and a LDL-cholesterol of <100

Call Us First 

Severe sinus headache and not sure how to get relief?

Our physicians are on-call 24/7 and available to review your medical history, perform a review of symptoms, and advise you on whether you need to go to urgent care, emergency room, or to the pharmacy to pick up a prescription they send. We want you to receive the best care in the best setting.

Call **850-696-4000** and ask the operator for the Woodlands primary care physician on-call prior to going to the emergency room.

