



The cholesterol-lowering medicines known as statins

reduce the chances of a heart attack and death in people who have an elevated risk of heart disease or who already have heart disease. A healthy diet and exercise can also help reduce your cholesterol levels.

But if you do need to take a statin, to help you and your doctor choose the right one, *Consumers Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of a 23-page report you can access on the Internet at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site.

DO YOU NEED A STATIN?

Your cholesterol level is one important factor that will help determine whether you need treatment with a statin. But it is not the only risk factor for heart disease, which include older age, diabetes, a family history of heart disease, high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity, and smoking. Your doctor should ask you about those risk factors and take them into consideration before deciding whether a statin is appropriate for you.

Your doctor might prescribe a statin if blood tests determine that you have high LDL or "bad" cholesterol (above 160 mg/dL for some; 130 mg/dL for others), and if diet and exercise changes don't work, or are unlikely to bring your LDL level down.

Our Recommendations

There are seven statins, but they're not all the same. Some deliver a greater reduction in cholesterol than others. In addition, some statins are backed by stronger evidence that they reduce the risk of a heart attack, death from heart disease or stroke.

Statin costs can vary widely as well—from as little as \$11 per month to more than \$200. Most people who take them must continue to do so for years—perhaps for the rest of their life—so the cost can be an important factor to consider.

Taking the evidence for effectiveness, safety, and cost into account, we have chosen four statins as *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs*:

- Generic lovastatin or pravastatin—if you need to lower "bad" (LDL) cholesterol by less than 30 percent.
- Generic simvastatin (20 mg or 40 mg)—if you need an LDL reduction of 30 percent or more and/or have heart disease or diabetes, or if you've had a heart attack or have acute coronary syndrome and your LDL level is not highly elevated.
- Atorvastatin (Lipitor) (40 mg or 80 mg)—if you have had a heart attack or have acute coronary syndrome and your LDL is highly elevated.

Most people who need a statin should take the lowest dose that reduces their LDL cholesterol to an acceptable level, because higher doses pose a greater risk of serious side effects, such as muscle, kidney, and liver problems. But some people—such as those who have had a heart attack—might need a higher dose.

No matter what dose you take, if you experience muscle aches and pains when taking a statin, contact your doctor immediately. Also, ask your doctor about splitting your statin pills. It can save money and is a common practice.

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Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and the National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs*. These materials were made possible by a grant from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin (gabapentin).

What Should Your Cholesterol Levels Be?*

If Your Total Cholesterol Level is:	This is considered:
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline
240 mg/dL and above	High
If Your LDL Cholesterol Level is:	This is considered:
Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100-129 mg/dL	Near optimal/above optimal
130-159 mg/dL	Borderline high
160-189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very High
If Your HDL Cholesterol Level is:	This is considered:
Less than 40 mg/dL	Low, increases risk
41 - 59 mg/dL	OK, but less than optimal
60 mg/dL and above	Good, helps lower risk

* This table applies primarily to people with no other risk factors for heart disease.

Source: Adapted from the National Cholesterol Education Program, High Blood Cholesterol – What You Need to Know, revised June 2005. NIH Publication No. 05-3290.

Statin Choices for People Who Require LDL Lowering of Less than 30 percent

Generic Name and Dose Per Day	Brand Name ¹	Average Monthly Cost ²	Average Expected LDL Reduction	Reduces the Risk of Heart Attack? ³	Mortality Reduction?
Fluvastatin					
Fluvastatin 20 mg	Lescol	\$120	22%	Likely	Likely
Fluvastatin 40 mg	Lescol	\$120	25%		
Lovastatin					
CR BEST BUY Lovastatin 10 mg	Generic	\$11	21%	Yes	Likely ⁴
CR BEST BUY Lovastatin 20 mg	Generic	\$15	24%-27%		
CR BEST BUY Lovastatin 40 mg	Generic	\$51	31%		
Lovastatin 20 mg	Mevacor	\$82	24%-27%		
Lovastatin 40 mg	Mevacor	\$144 ⁵	31%		
Pravastatin					
Pravastatin 10 mg	Pravachol	\$140	18%-25%	Yes	Yes
Pravastatin 20 mg	Pravachol	\$143	23%-29%		
Pravastatin 40 mg	Pravachol	\$215	26%-34%		
CR BEST BUY Pravastatin 10 mg	Generic	\$34	18%-25%		
CR BEST BUY Pravastatin 20 mg	Generic	\$32	23%-29%		
CR BEST BUY Pravastatin 40 mg	Generic	\$47	26%-34%		
Simvastatin					
Simvastatin 10 mg	Zocor	\$106	26%-33%	Yes	Yes
Simvastatin 20 mg	Zocor	\$175	30%-40%		
Simvastatin 10 mg	Generic	\$36	26%-33%		
Simvastatin 20 mg	Generic	\$70	30%-40%		

Statin Choices for Higher Risk People

Generic Name and Dose Per Day	Brand Name ¹	Average Monthly Cost ²	Average Expected LDL Reduction	Reduces the Risk of Heart Attack? ³	Mortality Reduction?
Atorvastatin					
Atorvastatin 20 mg	Lipitor	\$161	42%-46%	Yes	Yes
CR BEST BUY Atorvastatin 40 mg	Lipitor	\$165	47%-51%		
CR BEST BUY Atorvastatin 80 mg	Lipitor	\$168	46%-54%		
Fluvastatin					
Fluvastatin sustained release 80 mg	Lescol XL	\$152	35%	Likely	Likely
Rosuvastatin					
Rosuvastatin 10 mg	Crestor	\$163	43%-50%	Yes	Likely
Rosuvastatin 20 mg	Crestor	\$164	52%-55%		
Rosuvastatin 40 mg	Crestor	\$162	55%-60%		
Simvastatin					
Simvastatin 20 mg	Zocor	\$175	30%-40%	Yes	Yes
Simvastatin 40 mg	Zocor	\$181	35%-45%		
CR BEST BUY Simvastatin 20 mg	Generic	\$70	30%-40%		
CR BEST BUY Simvastatin 40 mg	Generic	\$68	35%-45%		

1. "Generic" indicates a drug sold by generic name.

2. Prices reflect nationwide retail average for April 2010, rounded to nearest dollar. Information derived by *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions. Wolters Kluwer is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

3. Nonfatal and fatal heart attack plus deaths attributed to heart disease.

4. Lovastatin has not been proven to reduce deaths but the evidence strongly points in that direction.

5. Price based on a small number of prescriptions.

NOTE: The information contained in the *Consumer Reports Health Best Buy Drugs™* reports is for general informational purposes and is not intended to replace consultation with a physician or other health care professional. Consumers Union is not liable for any loss or injury related to your use of the reports. The reports are intended solely for individual, non-commercial use and may not be used in advertising, promotion, or for any other commercial purpose.