

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

October 25, 2015

“New Cholesterol-Lowering Drug Increases Problems”

Sold under the name of Praluent, alirocumab received FDA approval in July of 2015. It is a new class of cholesterol lowering drug, which increases our livers ability to soak up and remove low-density lipoprotein (LDL; the so called bad cholesterol). Praluent is supposed to be for those who do not respond to older statin medications or who have had adverse reactions to statins. Surprisingly, Praluent causes higher incidence of many of the same side effects as older statins. Most cholesterol-lowering drugs are called "statins" and drug manufacturers plan to "statinize" the planet. Yet, there is some scientific evidence that higher cholesterol levels can be linked to varied health and survival benefits. There isn't good science to support the notion that the lowest cholesterol levels are the best overall good health recommendation. Researchers at Texas A&M University have discovered that lower cholesterol levels can actually reduce muscle gain with exercising. There was a significant association of dietary cholesterol and change in strength. Those with higher cholesterol intake also had the highest muscle strength gain. A 2014 article from the Medical University of Vienna found that low cholesterol may increase kidney cancer patients' risk of dying from their disease. Low blood cholesterol before treatment was associated with more advanced tumor stages and cancer spread. Also, patients with high cholesterol had a 43% lower risk of dying from their cancer compared with patients with low cholesterol. Similarly, there exists quite a bit of evidence which "links" higher cholesterol levels with improved health outcomes and/or longevity in the elderly. A 2014 study found in individuals undergoing cardiac surgery, the higher someone's cholesterol, the lower their risk of succumbing to an infection post-surgery. Those with the lowest cholesterol levels, rate of infection approached 20% and those with the highest cholesterol levels, rates of infection was zero. For people over sixty, the Framingham study found that those with high cholesterol levels lived the longest. One in four Americans aged 45 and over take a cholesterol lowering statin drug, despite the associated risk and cost. Statins inhibit Coenzyme Q10, vitamin K2 and squalene, which can increase risk of heart attacks or immune dysfunction. Praluent increases risk of side effects of older statins with memory loss, confusion, muscle pain and eye problems. Side effects of excessively low cholesterol include depression, stroke, violent behavior, suicide and a heightened risk for cancer. People with a cholesterol level of 180 or below have a much higher risk for cancer than people whose level is 280 and women on statins had more than twice the rate of breast cancer.

In the America that I love, we must know the dangers of drugs we are taking. Please talk to your doctor.

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