

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Statins Fail To Prevent Dementia or Post-op Kidney Damage”

Cholesterol-lowering statins (Lipitor, atorvastatin; Crestor, rosuvastatin; Zocor, simvastatin; Mevacor and Pravachol) are multibillion dollar drugs and are taken by over seventy million Americans. Statins allegedly save you from hardening of the arteries by raising “good cholesterol (HDL)” and lowering supposedly “bad cholesterol (LDL).” However, there have been wild, unsupported claims of all sorts of additional benefits, including prevention of dementia to prevention of post-operative kidney damage. Theoretically, vascular risk factors, including high cholesterol levels, increase the risk for dementia due to Alzheimer disease and vascular dementia. A team of investigators from Queens University, Belfast, has used standard Cochrane methodology to evaluate the efficacy and safety of statins for the prevention of dementia in people at risk for dementia owing to their age. The researchers found that there is good evidence that statins do not prevent cognitive decline or dementia when given to people in late life who are at risk for vascular disease. The experts said, “We can now unequivocally advise our patients, and our colleagues, that statins are not effective in preventing dementia and that they should be taken only for known cardiovascular or metabolic indications.” Another area in which statins were thought to provide benefits beyond what would be expected from their effect on cholesterol levels was in prevention of post-operative kidney damage. The statins were supposed to decrease oxidative stress following cardiac surgery and prevent kidney damage in 30% of those patients. However, a 2016 JAMA article found that high-dose statin treatment did not reduce the risk of acute kidney injury in patients who underwent cardiac surgery. In fact, the data and safety monitoring board recommended stopping the study early due to increased kidney injury, but only for the group naive to statin treatment who received Lipitor. Further, the board later recommended stopping the study altogether due to the futility of using Lipitor to benefit cardiac surgery outcomes. Also, 36 statin-naive patients already had chronic kidney disease when they entered the study. Results showed that those randomized to atorvastatin had more than three times the rate of postop acute kidney injury compared with those given placebos. Interestingly, the famous Framingham study found that higher cholesterol levels were associated with increased mortality before the age of fifty, but after this age cholesterol levels in men and women showed no relationship with cardiovascular disease or total mortality and for every 1 mg/dl per year drop in cholesterol levels, there was a 14% increase in cardiovascular death and an 11% increase in overall mortality over the following eighteen years. Additionally, cholesterol is necessary to make sex hormones, vitamin D, brain cells, and enzymes that digest food.

In the America that I love, statins can be helpful but are not magical.

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