



July 2008

Cholesterol-controlling Drugs and Muscle Soreness



Drugs known as **statins** are widely prescribed by physicians to treat high cholesterol. These life-saving medications—such as atorvastatin, simvastatin and pravastatin—are safe and effective for the vast majority of patients.

However, as with most drugs, statins are not without side effects, **muscle pain** being among the more common. About 9% of patients report muscle pain, but for most of

them, the discomfort is self-limiting and ends within a few weeks of starting the medication.

For a few patients, however, **muscle pain continuing or intensifying over time may signal a rare and potentially life-threatening side effect**. One condition, myopathy, causes muscle wasting and weakness. Of greater concern is a rare condition known as rhabdomyolysis, which causes a more severe breakdown of muscle. Waste products from such muscle deterioration can result in kidney damage.

If you are one of the large number of people taking statin medication to help lower your cholesterol, your doctor needs to monitor any muscular discomfort you experience to ensure that you are getting the maximum benefits with minimal risk. You can expect him or her to ask you about this regularly.

In addition, physical therapy, including the application of heat or cold packs, can provide symptomatic relief, and that may be all that is needed. You can also expect us to ask you about muscle soreness to monitor whether your pain is a response to exercise or a severe reaction to the drugs you are taking. Early investigation and treatment of muscular pain can nip potential long-term problems in the bud.