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Drug Trial Is Halted After Niacin Fails to Protect the Heart

By ASSOCIATED PRESS Thursday, May 26, 2011 | [15 Comments](#)



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A drug that boosts people's good cholesterol didn't go on to prevent heart attacks, so regulators abruptly halt a major study Thursday.

The disappointing findings involve super-strength niacin, a type of B vitamin that many doctors already thought would help. The failed study marks the latest setback in the quest to harness good cholesterol to fight the bad kind.

"This sends us a bit back to the drawing board," said Dr. Susan Shurin, cardiovascular chief at the National Institutes of Health.

The bad kind of cholesterol, called LDL, is the main source of artery clogs. Popular statin drugs, sold in generic forms, are mainstays in lowering LDL. Yet many statin users still have heart attacks, because

HDL cholesterol, the good kind, helps fight artery build-up by carrying fats to the liver to be disposed. HDL also are at risk of heart disease. So scientists are testing whether giving HDL-boosting drugs in extra protection.

The newest study tested Abbott Laboratories' Niaspan, an extended-release form of niacin that is a few supplements. The drug has been sold for years, and previous studies have shown it does boost HDL and fewer heart attacks.

Researchers enrolled more than 3,400 statin users in the U.S. and Canada who had stable heart disease because of low HDL levels and too much of a different bad fat, triglycerides. They were given either 1 mg of medicine.

As expected, the Niaspan users saw their HDL levels rise and their levels of risky triglycerides drop. But the combination treatment didn't reduce heart attacks, strokes or the need for artery-clearing procedures.

That finding "is unexpected and a striking contrast to the results of previous trials," said Dr. Jeffrey Goldstein, who helped lead the study.

But it led the NIH to stop the study 18 months ahead of schedule.

Adding to the decision was a small increase in strokes in the high-dose niacin users — 28 among those who took the drug among the 1,696 placebo users. The NIH said it wasn't clear if that small difference was merely a coincidence or a risk from niacin. In fact, some of the strokes occurred after the Niaspan users quit taking that drug.

What's the message for heart patients?

Statin users who have very low LDL levels, like those in this study, don't need an extra prescription for cholesterol. Colorado cardiologist and American Heart Association spokesman who wasn't involved with the study.

But it's not clear if niacin would have any effect on people at higher risk or those who don't have a diagnosis of heart disease, said study co-leader Dr. William Boden of the University at Buffalo.

"We can't generalize these findings ... to patients that we didn't study," he said.

Eckel said it's "really hard to envision exactly what's going to happen in physicians' offices" in coming months. NIH urged people not to stop high-dose niacin without consulting a doctor.

Nor do the findings end hope that raising HDL eventually will pan out, Eckel said. While two other studies have shown some much stronger HDL-boosters, including a Merck & Co. drug named anacetrapib, that are under

—By LAURAN NEERGAARD

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LSchelin

They are still thinking that cholesterol causes heart attacks and it's just not true. They need to be focusing on plaque. My life long cholesterol level has never exceeded 147 yet I've had two heart attacks.

1 week ago 13 Likes



Tgroberts66

If cholesterol lowering drugs stopped heart attack and strokes, why are the people taking them still dying of infection and that is not being addressed. Cholesterol medicines are proven immune suppressors. That is w truth behind statins. You will be shocked.

1 week ago 7 Likes



dairyking887, Let's do this thing!

I took high-dose niacin (about 2 grams a day) for about four months, and I am certain that it lowered my "b

1 week ago 5 Likes



Debbie Cusick

Of course a low carb diet also raises HDL and lowers triglycerides too. I have an HDL of 74 and triglycerides many doctors suggesting that (including my own!). They just want to push DRUGS DRUGS DRUGS - including Niaspan. No thank you. :-)

1 week ago 5 Likes



David

I started taking niacin years ago, mainly because along with lipitor my levels were not where I want exercise and lipitor were only so so effective until I added niacin supps to my diet. The real truth is a heredity factors, life style and one very important and often missed observation, CRP, C-reactive protein when hused in a conjoint study of so called heart disease are responsible for as many as...[show more](#)

1 week ago in reply to Debbie Cusick



Sul

Apparently this drug does not meet the criteria for Obamacare. It is not a generic and it is not cheap. My recent heart attacks. We have familial cholesterolemia. I've been on Lipitor, Niaspan and Zetia from the day Zetia to great. No other regimens over the years brought my LDL down until this and my HDL up. As long as you probably for life.

1 week ago 3 Likes



patrick h

Oh God, just for a minute can we leave President Obama alone; you apparently have issues with the

1 week ago in reply to Sul 2 Likes



50plussam

I believe that those many doctors that already prescribe it as potential heart protection do so as they are bas times the results are much dependent on who the sponsors are.

<http://www.lifestyle-after50.c...>

1 week ago 3 Likes



Labbifri1

Most doctors I know tell you to watch your diet to lower your levels but it does not always work. I stopped e I eat lots of vegetables, chicken and fish. I started taking fish oil and vitamins. When I stopped my medicati It is not always what gives you a heart attack but it can contribute. There are other things, high blood press just one way. Don't think it is the one thing.

1 week ago 2 Likes



Greg

So they thought taking a natural substance and beefing it up to an amount that your body is not used to wor quick scheme by the pharmaceutical companies

1 week ago 1 Like



Gary R.

After 2 stents 14 months ago, have been closely watching my cholesterol numbers through exercise, medica on a full release Niacin - gradually worked up to 1500 mg. per day. Lipid panel results from two weeks ago : LDL (to 69); and a 15 point improvement in triglycerides (to 122). Overall cholesterol now at 139. Original numbers. Cardiologist wanted to put my on Niaspan but I opted for...[show more](#)

1 week ago 1 Like



Jc Parker10

that many here have voice, it is blatantly obvious that researchers, big pharma, medical doctors, and all of n cause increase LDL and decrease HDL? Out of control sugar causes out of control insulin, causes inflammat damage to every cell in the body, including blood vessels. Now the LDL forms plaques to repair the damage med's. No to insulin directed med's. No to medication in general. God did not create humans with a defici

5 days ago



Suhel Choudhury

I was taking Niacin for sometime but I decided to discontinue as it was raising my blood sugar level. I was d new study makes me feel good as niacin has no beneficial effect on heart disease.

Congratulations to researchers.

6 days ago



Shahryar_ali

Previous posts are right - Cholesterol doesn't cause heart attacks but does clog up arteries - however, I see it in its natural form and not manipulated, it works. I know niacin does work for me. I reduced my cholesterol using niacin for 6 months when nothing else worked. It raised my good cholesterol by 5 points though (from 40 to 45). My doctor says I should

1 week ago



Smith7499

read the book; Reverse Heart Disease Now. by dr. stephen sinatra and john roberts. this will give you a different perspective. I took their recommended vitamins and supplements (just the "bare essential ones") and my good cholesterol continued on niaspan and it went down. started taking their vitamins again and it is going back up. this book is not just theory they are definitely on to something. (prior to this I have had 4 stents, then triple bypass, then 3 more stents, and a

1 week ago

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