Drug Trial Is Halted After Niacin Fails to Protect the Heart

By ASSOCIATED PRESS Thursday, May 26, 2011 | 15 Comments

A drug that boosts people's good cholesterol didn't go on to prevent a heart attack and abruptly halted a major study Thursday.

The disappointing findings involve super-strength niacin, a type of B vitamin that many doctors already prescribe. The 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 Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. The latest setback casts doubt on a decades-long push to improve heart health by shifting the balance of cholesterol in the body.

The bad kind of cholesterol, called LDL, is the main source of artery clogs. Popular statin drugs, sold 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 of. HDL also are at risk of heart disease. So scientists are testing whether giving HDL-boosting drugs is an extra protection.

The newest study tested Abbott Laboratories' Niaspan, an extended-release form of niacin that is a fat 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 Niaspan or medicine.

As expected, the Niaspan users saw their HDL levels rise and their levels of risky triglycerides drop. A 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 Castelli, 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 among the 1,696 placebo users. The NIH said it wasn't clear if that small difference was merely a coin 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 medicine, said 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 diabetes preventive, 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 are some much stronger HDL-boosters, including a Merck & Co. drug named anacetrapib, that are under development.

—By LAURAN NEERGAARD
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.

LSchelin

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 why the truth behind statins. You will be shocked.

Tgroberts66
I took high-dose niacin (about 2 grams a day) for about four months, and I am certain that it lowered my "b

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

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 sups to my diet. The real truth is a heredity factors, life style and one very important and often missed observation, CRP, C-reaative pr whenhused in a conjoint study of so called heart disese are responsible for as many as...show more

Apparently this drug does not meet the criteria for Obamcare. It is not a generic and it is not cheap. My m 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.

Oh God, just for a minute can we leave President Obama alone, you apparently have issues with the
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 medicat 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 won 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. Originally 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 inflamm 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 deficien

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 the form and not manipulated, it works. I know niacin does worked for me. I reduced my cholesterol using niacin months when nothing else worked. It raised my good cholesterol by 5 points though (from 40 to 45). My doctor said it needed to be there, it was low.

1 week ago

Smith7499

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

1 week ago

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