DAILY MAIL (London)

August 29, 2011 Monday

**CHOLESTEROL BUSTERS 'PREVENT PNEUMONIA'**  
  
**LENGTH:** 180 words

TAKING cholesterol-busting statins cuts the risk of dying from infection and respiratory illness such as pneumonia, say researchers.

The drugs are prescribed to prevent heart attacks and strokes, but they could provide protection against other potentially fatal disorders.

Experts looked again at the long-term results for more than 10,000 patients with high blood pressure who were randomly allocated either atorvastatin or a placebo between 1998 and 2000.

In 2003, the trial was stopped early because the statin proved to be effective in preventing heart attacks and strokes.

Since then, most patients from both groups have been taking the drug.

The new analysis looked at the number and cause of deaths among the 4,605 patients based in the UK.

After 11 years' follow-up, overall mortality was 14 per cent lower in the group originally taking the statin, due largely to fewer deaths from infection and respiratory illness.

Professor Peter Sever, from the International Centre for Circulatory Health at Imperial College London, who led the study, said: 'This result is very unexpected.'

telegraph.co.uk

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**Statins could help to fight infections;   
Statins have been found to cut death from infections that cause illnesses such as pneumonia by a third, which could lead to even more people being prescribed the so-called wonder drugs.**  
**BYLINE:** By Stephen Adams Medical Correspondent in Paris  
  
**LENGTH:** 658 words

Up to seven million people in Britain take the cholesterol-lowering medication, which can save lives by reducing the chances of suffering a heart attack or stroke.

But "unexpected" findings from British researchers suggest that statins' principal long-term benefit is stopping deaths from infections and respiratory illness.

It could mean that patients at higher risk of developing pneumonia could also be prescribed the drugs, despite a fear that too many "worried well" already take statins, which cost the NHS about £500million a year.

A study in The Lancet last month suggested some people taking the drugs were unlikely to gain any benefit.

Prof Peter Sever, from Imperial College London's international centre for circulatory health, said of the latest findings: "This result is very unexpected.

The benefits of statins for preventing heart attacks and strokes are well established, but after long-term follow-up the most significant effects seem to be on deaths from other causes."

There was now "an emerging evidence base for statins protecting against infections", said Prof Sever, who presented the results yesterday at the annual congress of the European Society of Cardiology in Paris.

A paper has also been published in the European Heart Journal.

He said: "We know that if you are on a statin and you get pneumonia, you are less likely to die.

"There are about 15 observational studies that show statins protect you against worsening infection and death from infection."

Prof Sever said the statins appeared to lessen the production of "toxic" inflammatory agents in the blood, which are stimulated by infections.

Prof Sever said: "This study is going to make people think more about the non-cardiovascular benefits of statins."

Prof Sever's team analysed the death certificates of almost 1,000 people.

They were among 10,000 volunteers with high blood pressure who had originally enrolled in the Anglo-Scandinavian Cardiac Outcomes Trial (Ascot) to test a type of statin, called atorvastatin.

They found that, 11 years after the Ascot trial started, deaths from infections and respiratory problems were 36 per cent lower in those originally given the statin, compared with those given a placebo.

Since the Ascot trial started, there were 37 deaths from infections and respiratory illness in the atorvastatin group, compared with 56 in the control group.

Prof Sever said of these differences: "The numbers are large.

It's a very robust study."

There was no difference in death rates from cancer.

Prof Sever, whose previous work helped formulate NHS guidelines for statin use, cautioned against widening statin prescription based on a single study.

He said: "One swallow does not make a summer."

Studies have shown that statins can cause side effects such as muscle weakness, and liver and kidney problems.

Others also questioned the validity of the data, noting the trial was not designed to look at causes of death other than from cardiovascular disease.

Guy De Backer, from Ghent University in Belgium, said: "I want to remain cautious.

We all know that these findings can occur by chance alone.

They are interesting but they don't stand on their own."

Those given the statin at the start of the Ascot trial were 14 per cent less likely to die during that period.

The trial was stopped after three years since atorvastatin had been shown to reduce the chance of a non-fatal heart attack and death from heart disease by 36 per cent.

Prof Sever said the lower rate of deaths from infections and respiratory illness over the 11-year period since the trial began was a "carry over" effect from being given atorvastatin at the start.

Prof Sever's study was funded by Pfizer, which makes atorvastatin.

However, the academic noted: "I have no reason to believe that atorvastatin is unique in these non-cardiovascular actions."

Atorvastatin, which currently costs £26 per patient per month compared with £2 for a "'generic" drug, is also due to come off patent soon.

The Express

August 29, 2011 Monday   
U.K. 1st Edition

**DRUG THAT WILL SAVE MILLIONS OF LIVES**  
  
**BYLINE:** By Jo Willey  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; 01  
  
**LENGTH:** 527 words

Now scientists discover statins can fight many killer diseases

HEART pills taken by millions of Britons are even more powerful than previously thought and could save many more lives each year.

Research into cholesterolbusting statins has found that not only do they slash death rates from heart disease and strokes, they may also protect people from serious infections and respiratory disease.

More than six million people take statins to reduce harmful levels of artery-clogging "bad" LDL cholesterol.

The wonder drugs are credited with saving tens of thousands of lives in recent years.

But it was revealed yesterday that they can help cut the number of deaths from infections and respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia.

Professor Peter Sever, from the International Centre for Circulatory Health at Imperial College London, said: "There is emerging evidence that there are increasing benefits of statins far beyond those that we had ever imagined when they were first introduced.

"This opens up a whole new area of research which is very exciting as they could be of much greater benefit to the health of the nation than we realised.

"From what we know about statins, not only do they have cholesterol-lowering benefits, they appear to suppress markers of inflammation and infection which could potentially be highly beneficial to patients."

Prof Sever, who led a new study, presented his findings at the European Society of Cardiology Congress in Paris yesterday as the research was simultaneously published in the European Heart Journal.

He found that eight years after a statins trial ended, they showed major benefits in reducing deaths from infection and respiratory illness.

The study - called Ascot, the Anglo-Scandinavian Cardiac Outcomes Trial - saw over 10,000 patients in the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia with high blood pressure allocated either atorvastatin or a placebo.

However, in 2003, the trial was stopped early because the statin proved to be so beneficial in preventing heart attacks and strokes that it was considered unethical to continue allowing people at risk to take a placebo.

Since then, most participants from both groups have been taking statins.

And Prof Sever said his new analysis has shown that eight years on, the most significant difference between the statin takers and those given the placebo is a reduction in deaths from infection and respiratory illness.

The analysis looked at the number and cause of deaths among the 4,605 participants in the Ascot trial who are based in the UK.

Among the UK participants, 460 of the original statin group have died, compared with 520 of the placebo group.

The difference is largely explained by a 36 per cent reduction in deaths from infection and respiratory illness.

Dr John Moore-Gillon, honorary medical adviser for the British Lung Foundation said: "The apparent impact of statins on death rates from respiratory disease is a welcome, if unexpected, finding."

Last month, figures from the British Heart Foundation revealed that statins now make up a fifth of all heart medicines prescribed each year in England.

They are being dished out at the rate of more than a million prescriptions a week.

The Mirror

August 29, 2011 Monday   
1 Star Edition

**LIFE-SAVER BONUS OF HEART TABLETS**  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 16  
  
**LENGTH:** 212 words

By ANDREW GREGORYPILLS

taken by millions of heart patients could be used to save many more people with different ailments, say scientists.

Statins have now also been found to cut death from infections that cause illnesses such as pneumonia by a third.

And it could lead to many more people being prescribed the so-called wonder drugs. Prof Peter Sever, of Imperial College London, said: "This result is very unexpected.

The benefits for preventing heart attacks and strokes are well-established, but after longterm follow-up the most significant effects seem to be on other causes."

He added: "It is quite remarkable.

Some studies have suggested that statins protect against death from infectious diseases.

More research is needed to explain how these drugs might have unforeseen benefits."

The original Anglo-Scandinavian research into the success of statins was stopped early because the drugs were so effective at preventing heart attacks and strokes.

But new analysis has shown that, eight years on, they may also reduce deaths from infection and respiratory illness.

The findings, based on a study of 10,000 patients in the UK, Ireland and Scaninavia, were presented at the European Society of Cardiology Congress in Paris yesterday and published in the European Heart Journal.

The Sun (England)

August 29, 2011 Monday   
Edition 2;   
National Edition

**The killer diseases 'beaten' by statins**  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 12  
  
**LENGTH:** 149 words

CHOLESTEROL pills taken by millions of Britons may also protect people from serious infection and respiratory illnesses, researchers claim.

They found the death rate among patients given statins eight years ago to cut levels of bad cholesterol is still lower.

Prof Peter Sever, of Imperial College London, said: "It is quite remarkable that there is still this difference between the two groups, eight years after the trial finished.

"Some studies have suggested that statins protect people against death from infectious diseases such as pneumonia.

"More research is needed."

More than 10,000 patients in the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia with high blood pressure took part in the trial.

Meanwhile, two new drugs could slash the risk of stroke by up to 30 per cent in high-risk patients.

Pradaxa and Apixaban thin the blood of people with irregular heartbeats.

They could be available in within two years.

The Times (London)

August 29, 2011 Monday   
Edition 2;   
National Edition

**Statins can stave off pneumonia and other infections, says study**  
  
**BYLINE:** Jack Malvern  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 17  
  
**LENGTH:** 291 words

Statins, the drugs designed to prevent heart attacks and strokes, are also effective in battling respiratory illness and other infections, research suggests.

Scientists at Imperial College London found that patients who took the drugs in a trial that ended in 2003 are faring better than those who took a placebo, even though most participants from both groups have been taking statins since.

The biggest difference between the groups eight years on is that patients who have taken statins for longer are less susceptible to lung infections such as pneumonia.

The overall death rate since the trial began is 14 per cent lower in the group who were prescribed statins from the beginning.

Peter Sever, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology at the university, said that more work would be necessary to find out why 460 of the statins group had died compared with 520 in the placebo group.

"This result is very unexpected," he said.

"The benefits of statins for preventing heart attacks and strokes are well-established, but the most significant effects seem to be on deaths from other causes.

It's quite remarkable that there is still this difference between the two groups, eight years after the trial finished.

"Some studies have suggested that statins protect against death from infectious diseases such as pneumonia.

More research is needed to explain how these drugs might have unforeseen actions that prevent deaths from other illnesses."

Deaths from cardiovascular disease were also lower in the original statin group, but the difference was not statistically significant.

There was no difference in deaths from cancer.

The initial results of the trial had a huge influence on guidelines recommending the use of statins for people at risk of heart disease.