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## Statin prescriptions soar to a million a WEEK despite side effects

By [Jenny Hope](#)

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Prescriptions for statins have reached record levels, with the number soaring over the last 30 years.

Around one million prescriptions for the cholesterol-lowering drugs are written each week, compared with a few thousand in 1981.

Despite side effects ranging from memory loss to muscle pains for the unlucky few, statins have become a mainstay for doctors treating heart attack and stroke survivors.



**Soaring: Statin prescriptions have reached record levels as doctors issue more than one million a week to help heart attack and stroke survivors**

They make up nearly a fifth of all medicines prescribed for heart and circulatory disease, according to the British Heart Foundation.

There are more than 52 million prescriptions for lipid-lowering drugs – the majority of which are statins – in England each year.

The drugs are effective in lowering levels of cholesterol, the fatty substance in the blood that clogs up arteries.

The BHF says prescriptions related to heart and circulatory disease total about 266million annually.

In 1981, lipid-lowering drugs only accounted for 295,000 – not even one per cent of a total 46million prescriptions for cardiovascular medicines.

Professor Peter Weissberg, Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation, said 'When the BHF was founded in 1961, statins weren't even available to doctors but now they help many millions of people across the UK.

'They've undoubtedly changed the face of heart disease treatment for the better and prevented many heart attacks and strokes.

'As with any other medicine, some people do experience side effects from statins but these are rarely life threatening and the benefits of statins far outweigh any disadvantages.

'They continue to make a major contribution to the nation's heart health.'

About 7million patients in the UK are taking statins, many of whom have survived a first heart attack.



**Plenty of benefits: Professor Peter Weissberg said that despite side effects, statins had undoubtedly changed the face of heart disease treatment for the better**

But the Cochrane Library recently said there was little evidence of protection unless a person's risk of a heart attack was already high.

Warnings about side effects such as memory loss, fatigue, muscle pain and weakness, continue to emerge, with estimates ranging from one to 20 per cent of patients affected.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency recently warned about additional risks including sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction and depression.

Research last month found high dose statins increase the risk of type 2 diabetes by 12 per cent compared with moderate doses.

But the BHF said the drugs were safe.

Cambridge GP and Associate Medical Director at the BHF, Dr Mike Knapton, said 'Statins are among the safest and most studied drugs available to me for the benefit of patients.

'Over the course of my 30-year career in medicine, I've seen lots of people debilitated by heart attacks and strokes and I try very hard to prevent them happening – statins help me to do that.

'But these drugs aren't the only development we've seen in the field of cardiovascular care.

'The last 50 years have seen huge advances, including heart failure drugs and heart transplants, and most children born with a heart defect now survive thanks to life-saving surgery.

'Combined with statins, these breakthroughs have undoubtedly improved people's health and saved lives.'

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'Some people do experience side effects from statins but these are rarely life threatening and the benefits of statins far outweigh any disadvantages.' Hmmm, then why am I, a previously very healthy 60+ year old in constant pain after taking statins. The pain in my muscles has stopped me doing all the things I was able to do, I never knew that this could be a side effect. Even having stopped taking them I am nowhere near as mobile as I was before being prescribed them & talking to other people on them I have found that more have suffered side effects than not.

- R Lee, Dorset, 06/7/2011 07:24

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Interesting to read the postings by Doctors who claim they only have their patients best interests at heart, and are not influenced by outside factors. I defy anyone to be impartial when acting on Government policy directives, with the added incentive of a per head bounty upon successful recruitment. Even if they think they are not being influenced, chances are subconsciously they are. And that goes for many other health directives too.

- Waddy, Whangarei, New Zealand, 06/7/2011 02:47

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Not sure what to make of doctors who never take the time to do some independent research on the side effects of statins, their dubious effectiveness and the twisted numbers used to make them look beneficial. They believe everything that the pharmaceutical companies say (positive, of course) about statin drugs, and they believe nothing of what the victims of these drugs have to say. Is it laziness? Is it arrogance or some kind of belief that the opinions of "non-doctors" are worthless? Sorry, but even if they mean no harm and only wish to help their patients, if they are prescribing these drugs they are not very good doctors.

- MWeather, Riverside, USA, 06/7/2011 00:02

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"Health" centres are simply legalised drug pushers. Big Pharma is laughing all the way to the bank. The vast majority of us would be a lot healthier if we threw the pills in the bin, got a dog and took it for a walk every day. Propaganda tells us that

smoking is deadly, and alcohol is as bad. They don't tell you that the thing most likely to kill you is your Doctor. Remember Dr Johnsons' maxim, "An apple a day will keep the doctor away, as long as it's well aimed.

- Citizen119, City17, SW Region, EUSSR, 05/7/2011 23:47

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Clinical trials (performed by the pharmaceutical companies themselves, of course) suggest that statins halve the risk of heart attacks, etc in those people at risk. This is half of the absolute risk of 2%. In other words, only 1 out of 100 will benefit from taking statins; 1 will die anyway and 98 may experience one of more of the possibly debilitating or even lethal side-effects.

- Wot's up, Doc?, Bromley, 05/7/2011 22:26

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Reply to: - Kim, WA State, USA, 05/7/2011 20:26 I was on Statins having suffered a couple of heart attacks until a small article in this newspaper warned me something might be wrong. (about 18 months ago). I googled "Statin Warning" and came up with hundreds of sites warning of the dangers of them. I looked at the side effects on my tablets and was horrified to see that "DEATH" was listed as a side effect. I spoke to two heart specialists, a pharmacist and my GP who had heard nothing about this. My GP was the only one to show any concern (as he was on Statins too). He changed my tablets for "Ezetrol" which instead of working on the kidneys works on the gut. Having searched extensively and with the information I found out about; 'Good cholesterol' vs 'Bad cholesterol', I finally gave up taking these too. I eat a very low cholesterol diet anyway. so the benefits seem to be way outnumbered by the risks.

- John Preston, Stoke on Trent, 05/7/2011 21:56

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