

## Can fish oil replace statins in lowering cholesterol?

With 40 percent of heart patients who take cholesterol-lowering statins stopping the drug in less than a year, doctors have been on the lookout for an alternative.

And that alternative may be fish oil and red rice, says a new study.

Doctors believe that high costs, adverse effects, poor understanding of benefits and reluctance to take medications long-term are reasons why some patients stop taking statins.

To ascertain whether an alternative to statins would be effective, a research group from Pennsylvania University followed 74 patients with high blood cholesterol who were required to use statins.

They were randomly assigned to the alternative or a statin group and followed for three months.

The alternative treatment participants received daily fish oil and red yeast rice supplements, and they were enrolled in a multi-disciplinary lifestyle programme that involved weekly meetings with a cardiologist, dietician, exercise physiologist and several alternative or relaxation practitioners.

Red yeast rice, a dietary staple in some Asian countries, contains several compounds known to inhibit cholesterol production.

The statin group participants received 40 mg of simvastatin daily, as well as printed materials about diet and exercise recommendations. At the end of the three-month period, participants from both groups underwent blood cholesterol testing to determine the percentage change in LDL cholesterol.

Researchers noted that there was a reduction in LDL cholesterol levels in both groups. The alternative treatment group experienced a 42.4 percent reduction.

The statin group experienced a 39.6 percent reduction. Members of the alternative therapy group also had a substantial reduction in triglycerides, another form of fat found in the blood, and lost more weight.

'Our study was designed to test a comprehensive and holistic approach to lipid lowering,' noted the study's co-author, David Becker.

'These results are intriguing and show a potential benefit of an alternative, or naturopathic, approach to a common medical condition.'

The findings of the study have been published in the latest issue of the journal Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

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