More intensive statin treatments produce even greater health benefit results

By ACSH Staff — November 10, 2010

A new meta-analysis of statin drug trials shows[1] that the lower your “bad” cholesterol, the lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Even those whose low-density lipoprotein (LDL, the “bad” cholesterol) levels are already on the low side stand to benefit by further reductions, the study showed. Published in the Lancet, the analysis of 26 statin trials covering 170,000 people found treating patients more intensively with statin drugs to reduce LDL cholesterol results in a greater reduction in cardiovascular and cerebrovascular events. Five out of the 26 trials reviewed by scientists from the Cholesterol Treatment Trialists’ (CTT) Collaboration compared intensive statin treatment to usual statin doses. The researchers found that patients in the more intensive treatment group had a 15 percent further decrease in major vascular problems compared to the less intensive treatment group. They were also 13 percent less likely to suffer a heart-related death or non-fatal heart attack, 19 percent less likely to need a bypass or other interventions, and had 16 percent fewer strokes.

The remaining 21 trials looked at the effects of statin treatment versus no treatment; when all 26 trials were analyzed together, the results indicated that deaths from all causes were cut by 10 percent for every 1.0 millimole per liter reduction in LDL cholesterol (equivalent to a 39 milligram per deciliter reduction, in U.S. units).

In a commentary accompanying the study, Dr. Bernard Cheung and Dr. Karen Lam of the University of Hong Kong wrote, “At the population level, statins are underused,” leading some doctors and ACSH staffers to joke that statins should be added to the drinking water supply.

“The bottom line is that more and more of us should be on statins because the lower your LDL level is, the less likely you are to have a cardiovascular event,” says Dr. Ross.

Previous studies investigating the potential adverse effects associated with very low LDL levels found there was an elevated risk of cancer, but this study found no evidence of any such increased risk.