



## Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

### Cholesterol-Lowering Drugs **Atorvastatin (Lipitor)**

Many people are taking cholesterol-lowering drugs prescribed by their health care provider. Some information about some of those drugs will be presented in a series of bulletin inserts. For more information and information specific to your situation, ask your health care provider. One of the commonly prescribed cholesterol-lowering drugs is atorvastatin (generic name) or Lipitor (brand name).

#### **Why is Atorvastatin prescribed?**

Atorvastatin is used as an addition to diet to reduce the LDL, total cholesterol, and triglyceride levels and to increase the HDL (good cholesterol) levels in people whose cholesterol levels are too high. It also is used sometimes to reduce the risk of heart attacks, strokes and heart failure in patients who have heart disease or may be at increased risk for heart disease.

#### **What is the usual dose?**

The dose prescribed by your health care provider is based on your cholesterol levels and other health factors you have, such as heart disease, liver disease, kidney function, etc. Often it will be started at a lower dose and increased gradually if cholesterol levels are not dropping to acceptable levels.

#### **How is it taken?**

It is in pill form, taken by mouth. It can be taken with or without meals. The look of the pills may vary depending on which company is making the generic form.

#### **What are some adverse reactions of Atorvastatin?**

Adverse reactions may include some or none of the following: headache, weakness, insomnia, swelling of legs or feet, sore throat, runny nose, sinusitis, abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea, gas, heartburn, nausea, bone or muscle pain. Most people do not experience these reactions, or experience them to a mild degree. They may appear initially, then disappear as the body gets used to the drug. If any of the adverse symptoms become severe or if there is excessive bone or muscle pain, it should be reported to your health care provider immediately as a serious condition leading to kidney failure may develop.

#### **What about other drugs?**

Drugs such as antacids, some antibiotics, anti-fungus drugs, some heart medicines and hormonal contraceptives may have an effect on atorvastatin by increasing or decreasing its effect. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist to evaluate all of your prescriptions to determine their compatibility.

#### **What about over-the-counter remedies?**

Some herbal supplements such as eucalyptus, jin bu huan, kava or red yeast rice taken with atorvastatin may raise the risk of liver failure or other adverse reactions. The use of herbal

supplements while on atorvastatin is not recommended. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for more information.

**What about foods?**

Grapefruit juice may increase the drug levels, which increases the risk of adverse reactions. Drinking grapefruit juice while taking atorvastatin is not recommended.

**What other cautions are there with atorvastatin?**

Liver function tests should be done periodically, pregnant and nursing women should not take atorvastatin, and excessive alcohol use should be avoided as this places more burden on the liver. Of course, blood tests for cholesterol levels will need to be done periodically to see if the drug is effectively reducing the “bad” cholesterol levels.

**What should I do if I have an adverse reaction?**

Report any adverse reactions immediately to your health care provider so that he/she can determine if the reaction is from the drug or from something else. If it is from the drug, he/she may be able to change the dosage or prescribe a different drug.

**It is important for people to know as much as possible about the medications they are taking, so do not hesitate to ask questions about your medications.**

**What else can I do to lower my cholesterol?**

Eat a diet low in saturated fat, sugar and calories

And

Get some exercise every day

Source: Nursing 2010 Drug Handbook, Wolters Kluwer, Lippincott, Williams Wilkins

Virginia Esslinger, RN