



## Stewardship of the Body

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

### Cholesterol-Lowering Drugs

#### **Simvastatin (Zocor)**

To continue the series regarding cholesterol-lowering drugs, another one is simvastatin (generic name) or Zocor (brand name).

##### **Why is simvastatin prescribed?**

One of the uses of simvastatin is to reduce the total and LDL (bad) cholesterol levels in patients with elevated cholesterol levels. It is also used to reduce the risk of death from cardiovascular disease in patients who are at higher risk for coronary events because of existing heart disease, diabetes, peripheral vascular disease or previous stroke.

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

The dose of simvastatin varies with the reason it is prescribed and the response the patient gets from taking it. It can vary from 5 milligrams (mg) to 10, 20, 40, or 80 mg. It can be taken once a day or two or three times a day. Generally it is started at a lower dose and gradually increased until it is effective for the purpose for which it is prescribed.

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

Simvastatin comes in tablets that are taken by mouth. If only one dose a day is prescribed it is recommended to take it in the evening. **The time of day the drug is taken is important because the liver makes more cholesterol during the night.**

##### **What are some adverse reactions to simvastatin?**

Adverse reactions may include muscle weakness, headache, abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea, gas, heartburn, nausea, vomiting, or upper respiratory tract infection.

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

Some other heart medications as well as cyclosporine, fibrates and niacin and also some antibiotics and other drugs may cause serious problems when taken with simvastatin. Make sure your health care provider knows that you are taking simvastatin if he/she is prescribing other medications for you.

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

Some herbal supplements such as eucalyptus, jin bu huan, kava or red yeast rice taken with simvastatin may raise the risk of liver failure or other adverse reactions. The use of herbal supplements while on simvastatin 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 such as muscle damage. **Drinking grapefruit juice while taking simvastatin is not recommended.**

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

Liver function tests should be done periodically, pregnant and nursing women should not take simvastatin, 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

For more information and information specific to your situation, ask your health care provider.

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

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