

## Antioxidants and Lipid Lowering Drugs

*Study suggests managing heart disease with antioxidant vitamins may do more harm than good for people on cholesterol-lowering drugs.*

According to 2001 study, antioxidant supplements may decrease the cholesterol-lowering effects of common cholesterol medications like Niacin and Simvastatin. This was a surprising finding since previous studies have suggested that antioxidants *in foods* may lower the risk of heart disease. High cholesterol is a significant risk factor for heart disease.

Researchers followed 153 patients with heart disease for one year on one of four therapies: cholesterol-lowering drugs, antioxidant supplements, a combination of both, or a placebo. As expected, they found that the drugs lowered LDL “bad” cholesterol and raised HDL “good” cholesterol. *However, the combination with antioxidants reduced the effects of the drugs, and antioxidant supplements alone showed no improvements in cholesterol levels.*

Antioxidants like Vitamins E, C, beta-carotene and selenium have become widely popular dietary supplements over the last decade. Several previous studies suggest that diets rich in antioxidants have beneficial effects in reducing chronic disease risk. However, whether taking antioxidants in supplements like liquids or tablets is equally beneficial is still unknown. This study indicates that antioxidant supplements may not be beneficial (in fact, may be detrimental) in managing heart disease, as opposed to getting the vitamins in food.

The American Heart Association, who published the study, recommends people get their vitamins and minerals from a balanced diet instead of supplements.

These new findings again underscore the importance of patients communicating with their doctors about supplements they use to avoid potential interactions with prescribed medications. Future studies will hopefully enlighten Americans further on this important topic.

### *References:*

Cheung, MC, Zhao, X-Q, Chait, A, Albers, JJ, Brown, BG. (2001). “Antioxidant Supplements Block the Response of HDL to Simvastatin-Niacin Therapy in Patients With Coronary Artery Disease and Low HDL,” *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, 21: 1320-1326.

Kuller, LH. (2001). “A Time to Stop Prescribing Antioxidant Vitamins to Prevent and Treat Heart Disease?” *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, 21: 1253.