

# Study hits emphasis on lower cholesterol

## High statin doses deemed better

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The struggle to control cholesterol frustrates millions, but a study suggests there has been too much emphasis on reducing so-called "bad" cholesterol to extremely low levels.

Rather, the study suggests, the emphasis should be on taking robust doses of statins.

Those drugs work by reducing the liver's production of cholesterol, but they also stabilize cholesterol plaque buildup and inflammation in arteries and thus make them less likely to rupture or form clots.

After an exhaustive review of research on low-density lipoprotein cholesterol and heart health, scientists say that there is no scientifically valid evidence to support an ultra-low LDL target of 70 milligrams per deciliter of blood for very high-risk patients, and that the evidence to support even a 100-milligram target is flawed.

The review was conducted by researchers from the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System and the University of Michigan Health System.

"Our review suggests that we in the medical community

have misunderstood the scientific evidence on whether very low LDL is important, or whether adequate doses of statins are what is really important," said Dr. Rodney A. Hayward, lead author of the study, published yesterday in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

"Current practice guidelines and recommendations often focus on getting LDL as low as possible, but the literature to date doesn't demonstrate that low LDL is what is truly important. It does show that statins save lives in high-cardiac-risk patients regardless of a person's LDL level," added Dr. Hayward, professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School.

People who have survived a heart attack or have factors putting them at high risk of heart problems probably should be on moderate to high doses of statin, Dr. Hayward and colleagues suggest.

But the benefits of using multiple medications to get LDL levels low is open to debate, the researchers said after reviewing all the studies cited by the National Cholesterol Education Program in setting new targets two years ago.