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Aggressive cholesterol-lowering improves heart attack survival

By Daniel Q. Haney
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS — A major study released Monday found that especially aggressive treatment with statin drugs, intended to drive cholesterol far below current standards, prevents new heart problems and saves lives.

These drug are a cornerstone of cardiac care, routinely prescribed for heart attack victims. However, the new results suggest doctors should opt for high doses of the most powerful brands to give recently discharged heart patients the best chance of survival.

"It's a lifesaving strategy and will become a huge paradigm shift in the treatment of patients with high cholesterol," predicted Dr. Steven Nissen of the Cleveland Clinic.

For several years, federal guidelines have recommended bringing down heart attack patients' levels of LDL, the bad cholesterol, below 100. To test whether this is far enough, doctors compared two strategies — moderate doses of an older statin versus high doses of a more powerful newer one.

The older drug, Pravachol, dropped patients' LDL by almost one-quarter to 95. But the newer one, Lipitor, cut it in half to just 62.

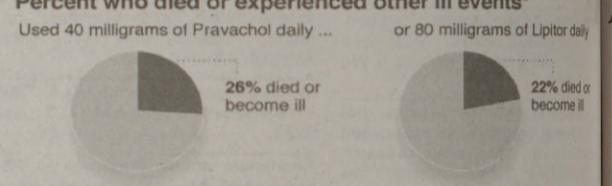
The lower cholesterol made a difference. After two years of follow-up, 26 percent of those getting Pravachol had died or experienced a variety of other ill events, including new heart attacks, bypass surgery, rehospitalization for chest pain or strokes. The same happened in 22 percent on Lipitor.

"We have very big news in the treatment of cholesterol," said the study's director, Dr. Christopher Cannon of Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. Heart attack "patients going home from the hos-

Lowering cholesterol, improving survival

Lowering heart attack victims' cholesterol below current standards improves heart attack survival, according to a new study. It suggests the newer, more potent variety of the statin drug, Lipitor, worked best with high-risk patients.

Percent who died or experienced other ill events*



* 4,162 patients with a new heart attack or severe chest pain were randomly assigned one of two drugs daily. After a two years of follow-up, researchers looked at which patients had died or experienced other ill events such as a new heart attack.

SOURCES: The New England Journal of Medicine; Associated Press

pital beginning today need to be treated with more intensive cholesterol-lowering."

Doctors caution that it is still too soon to say whether the same true for heart patients who have not had recent heart attacks. Several studies are under way to see if they, too, benefit from getting LDL far below 100.

Nevertheless, Cannon and others said the LDL goal for heart attack patients should be lowered, and soon. Dr. Thomas Pearson of the University of Rochester, who helped draw up the general guidelines several years ago, said the 100 target was based on very early research data.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

The other "Alamo" still open for film

BRACKETTVILLE, Texas (AP) — A Western movie with a replica of the Alamo scene for John Wayne's film the shrine of Texas liberty is bypassed for the latest remake of the Texas epic. But its owner says it's still a locale for productions.

Alamo Village, located about 120 miles west of San Antonio was the state's first permanent outdoor movie location and built itself as the largest and most complete movie set in the nation.

Virginia Shahan, whose husband Happy persuaded Wayne in 1957 to make the movie in Brackettville, says the 500-acre ranch that includes the set originally built to resemble San Antonio as the Alamo appeared in 1836 is for sale. The asking price is \$6.5 million.

A new movie about the Alamo battle, shot last year used a new set built close Austin, near Dripping Springs. That two-hour film, also titled "The Alamo" and produced by Touchstone Pictures, a division of Walt Disney Studios, is set to open April 9.

Since Wayne's film at Alamo Village, more than 100 films and television shows ranging from an IMAX production on the Alamo to kung-fu Westerns, have been made on the complete Old West town.

Texas cafeterias step up nutrition

DALLAS (AP) — At South Texas schools, a plan for serving nutritious meals to children is a little more than a year old.

Old favorites like tamales, breakfast tacos, bacon and nacho cheese injected with oil taken from small, herringlike fish. The contains omega-3 fatty acids, which research has linked to positive health effects, including a decreased risk of heart attack.

But critics are skeptical of benefits from adding a healthy fat to unhealthy foods. They say the quantity of omega-3 added to foods is too small to have any health benefit.

Earlier this month, the Agriculture Commission's Susan Combs issued a school nutrition policy restricting on fried and fatty foods, setting rules on types of foods that can be served in public schools.

Advocates of fish oil say way to make lunchtime healthier without getting rid of children's favorite foods.

"I'd say this is a milestone," Margaret Lopez, who leads a child nutrition program at the Texas Education Agency in the Rio Grande Valley. The Dallas Morning News Monday's editions.

However, others say rather put their energies teaching kids how to eat than adding a bit of nutrition to fatty tamales.