

TITLE 1: "Ask the Doctors"

TITLE 2:

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ABSTRACT OVERVIEW: Bruce L. Ehrenberg answers a question about whether or not cholesterol-lowering medication like Atromid-S, Zocor, and Lipitor could exacerbate RLS symptoms.

COPY OF ARTICLE:

Q. *For the past 20 years I've been on a cholesterol-lowering drug regimen: Atromid-S at dinnertime, then Zocor, and, for the past six months, Lipitor taken at bedtime. Has any research been done to determine whether these drugs could possibly serve to exacerbate RLS symptoms?*



A. We have just published a study of two cholesterol-lowering drugs and their effect on sleep. (Ehrenberg BL, Lamon-Fava S, Corbett KE, McNamara JR, Dallal GE, Schaefer EJ. Comparison of the effects of pravastatin and lovastatin on sleep disturbance in hypercholesterolemic subjects. *Sleep* 1999;1;22:117-21.)

These two drugs were the most widely used in their class until Zocor (simvastatin) and Lipitor (atorvastatin) came out, but as you can see, all four are in the "statin" class and work by a similar mechanism, the major differences being in the amount and type of side effects, the newer ones being somewhat better tolerated by most people.

We studied people who had complained of sleep problems while taking previous cholesterol-lowering medication, and we found that about half the patients had moderate or severe periodic limb movements of sleep (although we did not have anyone with full-blown RLS in the study) and an almost equal number had significant sleep apnea. All patients in the study underwent all-night sleep studies eight times, two before receiving any treatment, and two after each lovastatin, pravastatin and placebo. We found no consistent differences in any of the sleep studies.

Our conclusion was that the drugs do not cause sleep disorders, but the patients probably had the sleep problems prior to taking the medications and only complained about these problems after starting the new medication because they were ASKED about their sleep (perhaps for the first time ever).

This finding illustrates why it is important to ask your doctor if a new drug you are starting has been found to adversely affect sleep. You may not be able to get an answer from him or her, or even from the Internet, but at least you will be on record as having voiced a concern about your sleep.

Unfortunately, many of the most commonly prescribed medications do have adverse effects on sleep, and unless the prescribing doctor is a sleep specialist, he or she may not be aware of such a potential problem. Therefore, it is a good idea for the patient to raise this question so that the profession will be stimulated to do more studies such as the one cited above.

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