

New drug may aid in cholesterol fight

Alirocumab can be taken as complement to statins or prescribed alternative medicine

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A newly-developed drug which has recently been approved for use in Singapore may aid in the fight against cholesterol.

Those with high cholesterol levels are typically prescribed drugs called statins, but not everybody responds equally well to them.

Certain people – such as those who run a high risk of heart attacks

or have a family history of high cholesterol – may be taking statins, but still have exceptionally high cholesterol levels.

A small percentage may also not be able to take statins without developing side effects such as rashes or kidney problems.

But international clinical trials, which involved researchers from Singapore, have shown that the new drug alirocumab helps the body become more efficient at re-

moving cholesterol from the blood by targeting a specific protein.

Previous studies have shown that this protein, called PCSK9, is associated with high cholesterol.

Clinical trials for the new drug, which involved 29,000 people from 58 countries, found that it was effective in reducing cholesterol in people when statins alone could not do the job.

Besides being prescribed as a complement to statins, alirocumab can also be given as an alternative to the cholesterol-busting drug.

Adjunct Assistant Professor Jack Tan, deputy head of the cardiology department at the National Heart

Centre Singapore, said: “This is for those who are already on the maximum amounts of statins that they can tolerate.”

Such people may not be strictly intolerant to statins, but could suffer side effects if their doses are increased.

One person who found out that she was statin-intolerant is 77-year-old Chris Chiew, who was prescribed the drugs following a heart attack in February.

Two months after she began taking statins on a regular basis, her urine turned dark and doctors found out that the medication had caused her kidneys to fail.



Housewife Chris Chiew started taking statins after a heart attack. But two months later, it caused her kidneys to fail.

“I went to the hospital and had to go for kidney dialysis for four days,” the housewife recalled.

“The doctor told me that some people just cannot take statins.”

The new drug was approved by the Health Sciences Authority in April, and is already available at private clinics. It is estimated to reach

public hospitals within the year. A monthly dose costs around \$800.

However, doctors stressed that drugs are not the only way to reduce high cholesterol.

In fact, making lifestyle changes can be very effective, said Professor Tai E Shyong, who is from the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health. This includes making changes to your diet and getting sufficient exercise.

Said Prof Tai: “Even if you inherit the risk factors from your parents, you can still do something about it.”

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