

Cholesterol Drugs Hold Hidden Benefit for Heart Patients

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Cholesterol-busting drugs taken by more than two million Britons appear to cut the risk of an irregular heartbeat, experts said today.

Statins cut the chance of heart disease and heart attacks but now scientists believe they may have an extra protective effect.

A review of research published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC) noted findings on atrial fibrillation, an abnormal rhythm involving the upper chambers of the heart.

Researchers from France analysed data from six trials involving almost 3,600 patients, all of whom had had atrial fibrillation in the past or had a high risk of developing new atrial fibrillation following a heart attack or coronary bypass surgery.

Patients who were taking statins were 61 per cent less likely to develop atrial fibrillation than patients not on them.

Dr Laurent Fauchier, from the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Trousseau, Tours, France, said it is too early to consider prescribing statins to all patients with a history of atrial fibrillation.

However, he said: "A positive effect of statins on atrial fibrillation may contribute to a reduction in the number of strokes or episodes of worsening heart failure. "What patients should know is this: if your doctor prescribes a statin for any reason, it will decrease the risk of cardiac events related to atherosclerosis, and by the way, it may also decrease the risk of atrial fibrillation."