

# Statins May Cut Cancer Risk

By Julie Steenhuysen Tue Jan 8, 2008

CHICAGO (Reuters) - Statins -- those hard-working, cholesterol-fighting drugs -- may also cut the risk of developing cancer by as much as 25 percent, U.S. researchers said on Tuesday.

Veterans taking statin drugs had a 9.4 percent cancer incidence, compared to 13.2 percent for non-statin users, the researchers reported in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

"Our findings support the hypothesis that statins may reduce the risk of cancer, in particular lung and colorectal cancers," said Dr. Wildon Farwell of the Veterans Affairs Boston Healthcare System, who led the study.

"The risk reduction appeared to be around 25 percent," Farwell said in a telephone interview.

Statins -- the world's top-selling drugs -- have been so effective at lowering low-density lipoprotein or LDL, the so-called "bad" cholesterol, that some doctors have jokingly suggested they should be added to the public water supply.

Not only do they significantly cut the risk of heart attack and stroke but they also may reduce the risk of death from influenza, pneumonia and smoking.

In labs, statins have been shown to slow the growth of cancer cells and they have often been studied as a cancer fighter, with mixed results.

For their study, Farwell and colleagues looked at the health records of nearly 63,000 veterans in the Veteran Affairs New England Healthcare System between January 1997 and December 2005.

The veterans were divided into groups that had used either statin drugs -- including Pfizer Inc.'s Lipitor and Merck & Co. Inc.'s Zocor, now sold generically, -- or blood-pressure lowering drugs for at least one year.

Farwell said they chose those groups because patients on both types of drugs have similar health risks and are likely to get about the same amount of access to the healthcare system.

After adjusting for age, prior cancer screenings, smoking, lung disease and other conditions, the researchers found statin users had a reduced risk of all cancer types compared with those not taking statins.

The researchers also looked at five of the most common types of cancers in the study group: prostate, lung, colorectal, bladder cancer and melanoma.

"We found significant risk reduction for prostate, lung and colorectal cancer," he said.

They also found that the higher the statin dose, the lower the incidence of cancer.

The study did not show why statins seemed to lower the risk of cancer. The study had a few limitations. Participants were mostly white males, which could skew results.

"We don't want to give the impression that this is the definitive study that proves statins reduce the risk of cancer," Farwell said.

But he said the findings are compelling enough to warrant further study.