

# Number of Americans taking statins keeps rising: CDC

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Even more should be taking them to cut risk of heart attack and stroke, cardiologist says.

(HealthDay)—More Americans than ever are taking cholesterol-lowering medications, federal health officials reported Tuesday.

The percentage of adults aged 40 and older taking drugs that combat [high cholesterol](#) rose from 20 percent to 28 percent between 2003 and 2012, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Moreover, the use of statins increased from 18 percent to 26 percent, making them most commonly used cholesterol-lowering drugs. By 2011-12, 93 percent of adults using a cholesterol-lowering medication used a statin.

The CDC researchers said they couldn't speculate on the reasons for the increase. But one cardiologist pointed out that statins have been shown to lower the risk of [heart attack](#), stroke and premature death in men and women at risk for [heart disease](#) and stroke.

And "heart disease and stroke remain the leading cause of illness and death in the United States," said Dr. Gregg Fonarow, a professor of cardiology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

While evidence supports and guidelines recommend statins for all those with established heart disease, 29 percent of those patients aren't being treated with statins, Fonarow said. There are substantial treatment gaps for people with diabetes as well, he added.

"These data also show that while there has been some improvement over time, many individuals at risk for their first heart attack and stroke are not receiving one of the most effective, high-value preventative therapies available," Fonarow said.

"Improving the use of statin therapy among those eligible represents an important opportunity to further reduce death and disability due to heart disease and [stroke](#) in the United States," he said.

According to the report, the use of cholesterol-lowering drugs increased with age—17 percent of those aged 40 to 59 took such medications, while use increased to 48 percent among those 75 and older.

The research team, led by CDC epidemiologist Dr. Qiuping Gu, also found that about 71 percent of adults with heart disease and 54 percent of [adults](#) with high cholesterol were taking a cholesterol-lowering drug.

In addition, among those aged 40 to 64, health insurance played a role. Those with health insurance were more likely to take a cholesterol-lowering drug than those without insurance, Gu said.

**More information:** Visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#) for more on statins.

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