

Rx Fish Oil Cuts Heart Dangers in Statin Takers

By Alan Mozes

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Patients who have high [triglycerides](#) and take [cholesterol](#)-lowering [statins](#) to lower their risk for [heart attack](#) or [stroke](#) can cut that risk by another 30 percent by adding a high-dose omega-3 fatty acid pill, investigators report.

The prescription drug, called Vascepa, is not to be confused with over-the-counter dietary omega-3 (often [fish oil](#)) [supplements](#). Such supplements typically contain far lower doses of the critical omega-3 fatty acid called EPA and have not undergone a rigorous safety and effectiveness review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Since 2012, the FDA has approved Vascepa (icosapent ethyl) for patients whose [triglyceride fat](#) levels exceed 500 milligrams per deciliter of blood.

Now, an updated analysis of research first released last September suggests Vascepa markedly reduces a patient's lifetime risk of dying from [heart disease](#); experiencing a nonlethal heart attack or [stroke](#), or needing [heart](#) surgery or hospitalization for a heart complication.

"We found a 30 percent reduction in total ischemic events," said lead author Dr. Deepak Bhatt, referring to any number of serious heart problems caused by restricted blood flow. "That is a very large degree of clinical benefit."

Among 1,000 patients who take Vascepa for five years, nearly 160 serious heart problems would be prevented, he noted. That includes 12 cardiovascular-related deaths, 42 heart attacks, 14 strokes, 76 coronary artery bypasses and 16 hospitalizations for unstable [angina](#) ([chest pain](#) or heaviness) while at rest or during moderate activity.

Bhatt is executive director of international cardiovascular programs at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

He and his colleagues are slated to present their research -- which was funded by the New Jersey-based drug manufacturer Amarin Pharma, Inc. -- this week at a meeting of the American College of Cardiology, in New Orleans.

Research presented at meetings is typically considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

The study team likened the high dose of EPA contained in Vascepa to eating more than 20 servings of fish a week, minus the problematic [saturated fat](#).