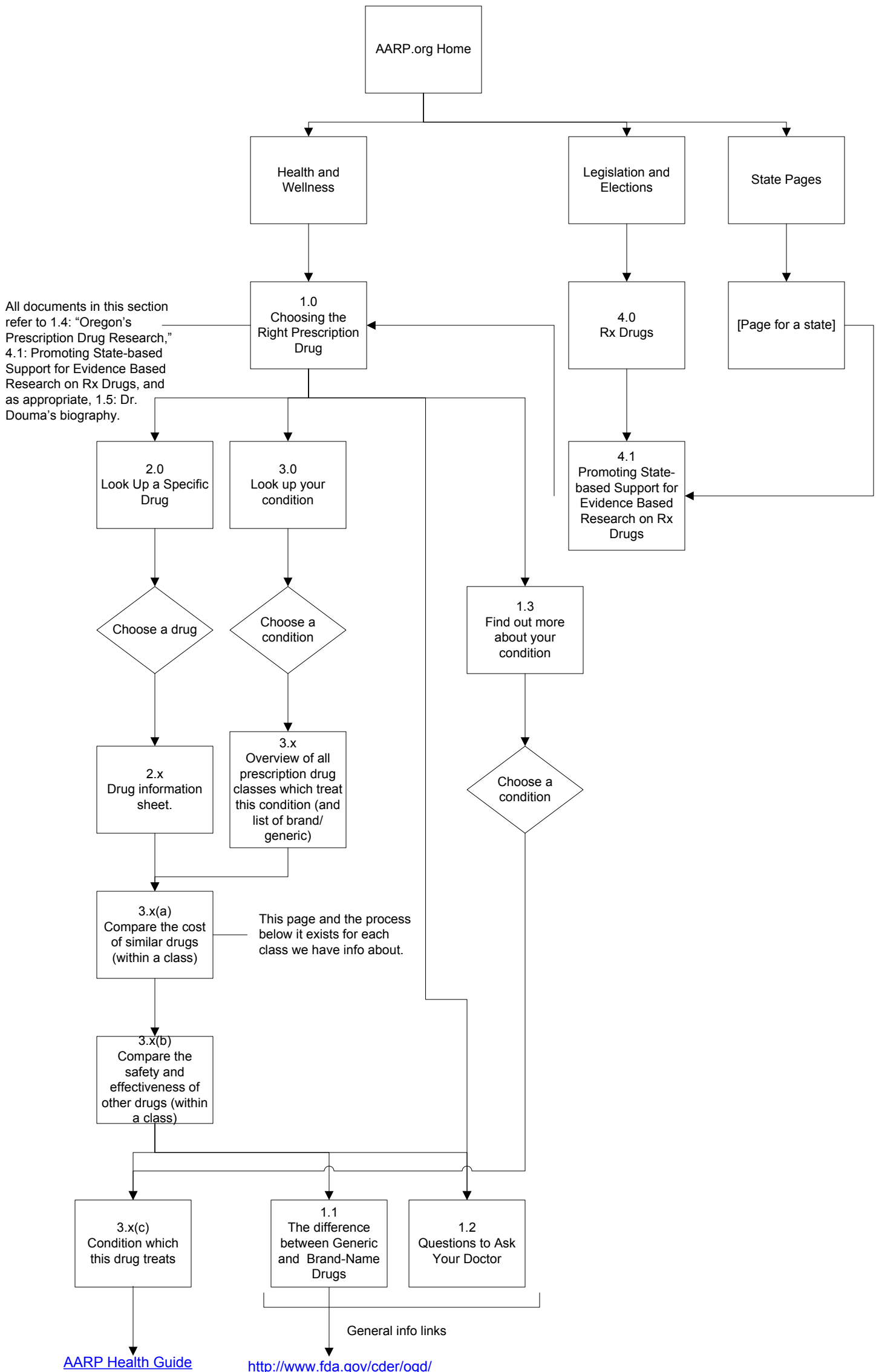


Overview of Ways to Navigate to Evidence Based Research



Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

<AARP Home
<Health and Wellness
Checkups and Prevention
Eating Well
Insurance and Medicare
Managing Stress
Choosing the Right Prescription Drug
Staying Active

[Promote Activism on Rx Drugs]

Image

You may be able to lower your prescription drug costs safely and effectively. Use this tool to compare drugs similar to those you're taking. It's a simple four-step process.

First, look up your prescription drug or your health condition. Second, learn more about your drug or the drugs used to treat your condition. Third, compare the cost of similar commonly-prescribed drugs. Finally, compare the safety and effectiveness of these drugs, and talk with your doctor.

[Look Up a Specific Drug](#)

or

[Look Up a Health Condition](#)

Talking With Your Doctor About Prescription Drugs

If you are taking a medication or deciding to take one, AARP recommends that you [ask your doctor and pharmacist a few simple questions](#).

Learn More About Your Health Condition

Whether you're newly diagnosed or continuing to cope with a long-term condition, it pays to [learn more about your condition](#).

Prescription drug research is provided by the Oregon Health Resources Commission and OHSU's Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center. [Read more about Oregon's Prescription Drug Research](#).

Medical information is contributed by [Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

[Print, Email, and Text Size Tools]

< Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Prescription drug research is provided by the Oregon Health Resources Commission and OHSU's Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center. [Read more about Oregon's Prescription Drug Research.](#)

Look Up a Specific Drug

Step 1 of 4

Select a prescription drug from below.

You can look by brand name, generic name, or the active ingredient. We have covered over 150 drugs for 9 different conditions. [If yours is not covered here](#), learn more about how you can help make information like this available.

Jump down the list to:

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [J](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [Q](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [X](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)

- A -

[Alora](#)
[Aciphex](#)
[Almotriptan](#)
[Altocor controlled release](#)
[Amaryl](#)
[Amerge](#)
[Ansaid](#)
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- B -

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[Chlorzoxazone](#)
[Climara patch](#)
[Crestor](#)
[Cyclobenzaprine](#)
[Dantrium](#)
[Dantrolene](#)
[Detrol](#)
[Detrol LA controlled release](#)
[DiaBeta](#)
[Diabinese](#)
[Diclofenac Potassium](#)
[Diclofenac Sodium](#)
[Diclofenac with Misoprostol](#)

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Learn More About Your Prescription Drug

Step 2 of 4

Mevacor

(Generic Name: Lovastatin)

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

[Next Step: Compare the Cost of Similar Drugs >>](#)

Mevacor is in a class of drugs called statins, which are primarily used to lower LDL cholesterol. When drugs are recommended for lowering cholesterol, statins are often chosen first. The dose of each statin needed to reduce cholesterol by the same amount varies.

Statins are also called HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors because of their negative effect on the enzyme HMG-CoA reductase. This enzyme is involved in making cholesterol in the liver.

Because some statins have been shown to decrease the risk of stroke as well as improve outcomes in people with coronary artery disease and diabetes, they are also recommended for these purposes.

Effectiveness

When used in approximately equivalent doses, Mevacor was not found to be different from other statin drugs in its ability to lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol.

Side Effects

Like all prescription or non-prescription medications, Mevacor has potential side effects. Side effects experienced in a few people include liver and muscle toxicity.

Is a Generic Available?

Mevacor is available as the generic drug Lovastatin.

[Next Step: Compare the Cost of Similar Drugs >>](#)

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Look Up a Health Condition

Step 1 of 4

Select a health condition from below.

We have covered 9 different conditions, and over 150 of the most common drugs that treat those conditions. [If yours is not covered here](#), learn more about how you can help make information like this available.

- [Chronic Pain](#)
- [Heartburn, Stomach Acid, Ulcer](#)
- [High Cholesterol](#)
- [Joint and Muscle Pain, Stiffness, Symptoms of Arthritis](#)
- [Menopausal Symptoms, Low Bone Density](#)
- [Migraine Headaches](#)
- [Spasticity, Muscle Spasms and Pain](#)
- [Type Two \(2\) Diabetes](#)
- [Urinary Incontinence, Overactive Bladder](#)

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Learn More About Drugs for Your Condition

Step 2 of 4

Lowering Cholesterol with Statin Drugs

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

Statin drugs are primarily used to lower LDL cholesterol. When drugs are recommended for lowering cholesterol, statins are often chosen first. Different doses of each statin are needed to reduce cholesterol by the same amount.

Statin drugs are also called HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors because of their negative effect on the enzyme HMG-CoA reductase. This enzyme is involved in making cholesterol in the liver.

Two other types of drugs that lower LDL cholesterol are bile acid binders and niacin. Niacin is the most effective of the three types of drugs in increasing HDL cholesterol (the so-called "good" cholesterol); bile acids have no effect, and statins raise HDL slightly.

Some statins have been shown to improve outcomes in people with coronary artery disease and diabetes and to decrease the risk of stroke. Even when LDL cholesterol is not high, statins are recommended for these purposes as well.

Like all prescription or non-prescription medications, statin drugs have potential side effects. Side effects from statins, experienced in a few people, include damage to the muscles or liver.

If you and your doctor decide that taking a statin drug is the best choice to improve your cholesterol levels or reduce other health risks, you still need to decide which one to take.

The statin class of drugs includes:

Active Ingredient	Generic Available?	Brand Name
Atorvastatin	NO	Lipitor
Fluvastatin	NO	Lescol
Lovastatin	YES	Mevacor
Pravastatin	NO	Pravachol
Resuvastatin	NO	Crestor
Simvastatin	NO	Zocor

[Next Step: Compare the Cost of Similar Drugs Used to Treat Your Condition>>](#)

[Next Step: Compare the Cost of Similar Drugs Used to Treat Your Condition>>](#)

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Compare the Cost of Similar Drugs

Step 3 of 4

Statin Drugs used to treat High Cholesterol

[Next Step: Safety and Effectiveness>>](#)

Compare costs using this table of commonly prescribed statin drugs.

Drug Name (Generic Identified)	Active Ingredient	Average price for 30-day supply *
Altocor controlled release	Lovastatin	\$78
Crestor	Rosuvastatin	\$83
Lescol	Fluvastatin	\$67
Lescol XL controlled release	Fluvastatin	\$83
Lipitor	Atorvastatin	\$90
Lovastatin (Generic)	Lovastatin	\$64
Mevacor	Lovastatin	\$96
Pravachol	Pravastatin	\$121
Zocor	Simvastatin	\$125

[Next Step: Safety and Effectiveness>>](#)

* Actual costs may be higher or lower based on the drug strength, dosing frequency, and other factors. These data were gathered from over 50,000 pharmacies nation-wide from the period of 1/1/04-3/31/04.

The average price for a 30-day supply for each drug was calculated by first multiplying the usual and customary cost for a 30-day supply by the number claims for each unique drug strength. We then summed these numbers for all strengths and divided by the total number of claims for each unique drug. The costs are averages weighted for utilization patterns.

Source: Drugs identified through Oregon Health Resources Commission; Cost data through AARP Pharmacy Service from United Healthcare.

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Safety and Effectiveness

Step 4 of 4

Choosing a Statin Drug to Lower Cholesterol

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

Statin Drugs Are Used to Improve Cholesterol Levels

Statin drugs are used to lower the level of LDL cholesterol and raise the level of HDL cholesterol. Because of this effect statins are used to reduce the risk of developing blood vessel diseases such as coronary artery disease and strokes. They are also used to reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes in people who already have coronary artery disease or who have diabetes.

Which Statin Drug Is Right for You?

If you and your doctor decide that taking a statin drug is the best choice to improve your cholesterol or decrease the risk of these diseases, you still need to choose among the many statin drugs available.

Comparing the Effectiveness of Statin Drugs

The Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center has reviewed the medical literature on the use of statin drugs and produced a report called "[Drug Class Review on HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors \(Statins\)](#)". This research can help you and your doctor choose the right drug for you. For information on the process used to write this report see the [overview of Oregon's Prescription Drug Research](#).

What the Research Says

Some conclusions from the Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center report are:

1. All statin drugs were able to reduce LDL cholesterol by at least 40 percent. At higher doses some of the statins were able to reduce LDL cholesterol by even greater amounts.
2. When statins are used in approximately equivalent doses, the increase in HDL cholesterol is similar for all.
3. Evidence supports the ability of [atorvastatin](#), [fluvastatin](#), [lovastatin](#), [pravastatin](#) and [simvastatin](#) to reduce problems in people with coronary artery disease.
4. The risk of stroke was shown to be reduced by atorvastatin, pravastatin, and simvastatin.
5. Pravastatin and simvastatin have been shown to lower the overall death rate.
6. The percentage of people getting muscle and liver toxicity while taking statins is low, and no differences were found among the statins with respect to these side effects.

Talking with Your Doctor and Pharmacist

The conclusions about statin drugs presented on this Web site are from the Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center report "Drug Class Review on HMG-CoA Reductase Inhibitors (Statins)." They are based on findings that were current at the time the report was written.

These findings are derived from group studies and may not necessarily apply to you, depending on your individual circumstances and medical history. Nevertheless, you can use the conclusions presented here as a good foundation to start a discussion with your doctor and pharmacist. AARP encourages you to discuss these findings to determine which (if any) drug is best for you.

Learn more about:

- [Talking with your doctor and pharmacist about prescription drugs](#)
- [The difference between generic and brand-name drugs](#)
- [Cholesterol](#)

Learn more about:

- [The difference between generic and brand-name drugs.](#)
- [Talking with Your Doctor and Pharmacist About Prescription Drugs](#)
- [Cholesterol](#)

Find information on another prescription.

- [Look Up a Specific Drug](#), or
- [Look Up a Health Condition](#)

Has this been useful for you? [Learn more about how you can help make this information like this available.](#)

Prescription drug research is provided by the Oregon Health Resources Commission and OHSU's Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center. [Read more about Oregon's Prescription Drug Research.](#)

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Cholesterol

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

Understanding Cholesterol

Cholesterol is often oversimplified as "bad for you." However, cholesterol is important for healthy cell functioning. What matters is having the right kinds of cholesterol in the right amounts. While your liver manufactures most of the cholesterol in your body, the rest comes from foods high in saturated fat. Meat, dairy, and other foods made from animal products are the source of cholesterol in our diets.

[<< Back to Safety and Effectiveness](#)

Also from AARP:

- [Information on high cholesterol from the AARP Health Guide](#)

Both high levels of LDL, the "bad cholesterol," and low levels of HDL, the "good cholesterol," promote atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). This is the major cause of cardiovascular disease. When fatty deposits called plaques block blood flow, the result can be a heart attack or stroke.

If you have other risk factors for heart disease (inactivity, smoking, obesity, or a family history of heart disease), unhealthy cholesterol levels pose an even greater risk.

What Are the Types of Cholesterol?

There are two main types of cholesterol:

LDL (low-density lipoprotein), the "bad cholesterol," contains more fat and tends to break into smaller pieces, sticking to artery walls. This contributes to the artery-clogging buildup of plaque.

HDL (high-density lipoprotein), the "good cholesterol," moves easily through the blood and sweeps cholesterol away to the liver, which processes it for removal.

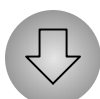
How Is High Cholesterol Diagnosed?

A blood sample, from a simple finger-stick or drawn from a vein, is analyzed. Your levels of total cholesterol, LDL, and HDL help your doctor evaluate your risk for atherosclerosis. While these numbers can be significant in themselves, it is important to consider them along with other risk factors you may have.

Today, experts recommend lower levels of LDL cholesterol than in the past, especially for people with cardiovascular disease or diabetes. The chart below summarizes generally accepted values. Many experts believe that a target range for LDL below 130 is appropriate for people without other risk factors. For people with risk factors such as heart disease or diabetes, an LDL level of less than 100 may provide even greater benefit. Cholesterol is measured in milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL).

What Do My Cholesterol Numbers Mean?

Total Cholesterol Level	Assessment
Less than 200	Desirable
200-239	Borderline high
Above 240	High
LDL Cholesterol Level	Assessment
Less than 100	Optimal
100-129	Near/above optimal
130-159	Borderline high
160-189	High
Above 190	Very high
HDL Cholesterol Level	Assessment
Above 60	High-desirable
Between 40 and 60	Average
Less than 40	Low



What Can I Do to Improve My Cholesterol Levels?

There are many things you can do to improve your cholesterol levels, including:

Use TLC. The TLC Diet (Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes Diet) is your first approach to lowering total and LDL cholesterol. This diet emphasizes low saturated fat, low cholesterol, and high fiber. It includes a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and low-fat dairy products.

Focus on fiber and healthy fats. Increase your intake of the soluble fiber found in oat bran, apples, legumes (beans), and other vegetables. Eat more nuts, vegetable oils, corn, and whole-grain rice.

Keep moving. Increase your physical activity to a minimum of 30 minutes most days of the week. Regular activity increases your "good" (HDL) cholesterol.

Step on the scale. Maintain your ideal weight and weigh yourself regularly.

Note your numbers. Experts recommend that people with acceptable readings and no risk factors for heart disease have their cholesterol measured every five years. Your doctor may advise more frequent testing if: you are currently taking cholesterol-lowering medications; you have other risk factors such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity; or you smoke or are inactive.

Talk to your doctor. Depending on your risk factors, your doctor may advise a cholesterol-lowering medication along with changes in lifestyle. It is important to follow the recommended schedule and dosage.

Drugs That Lower Cholesterol

There are three types of drugs used to treat abnormal cholesterol. All three lower LDL cholesterol and two raise the level of HDL.

Statins. The first type of cholesterol-lowering drugs are called statins. The primary goal of treatment with statins is to lower LDL cholesterol to a safer range. How low this should be depends on whether you have additional risk factors for blood vessel disease. Statins lower cholesterol by interfering with an enzyme involved in cholesterol production. They also raise levels of HDL cholesterol slightly. Research shows that statins improve outcomes in people with coronary artery disease and diabetes, and also decrease the risk of stroke.

Bile Acid Binders. The second type of cholesterol-lowering drugs are known as bile acid binders. These drugs chemically bind with bile acids in the intestines, causing them to be eliminated from the body. Because bile acids are made from cholesterol, loss of bile acids lowers cholesterol levels. However, bile acid binders often cause gas, bloating, and constipation, and may raise levels of triglycerides, another blood fat. Therefore, their use is more limited.

Niacin. Niacin, also called nicotinic acid, is the third type of cholesterol-lowering drug. Niacin reduces the production of LDL cholesterol. It also increases the level of HDL cholesterol and lowers triglycerides. Niacin, in recommended dosages of 3 milligrams or higher, can cause severe flushing (a sensation of warmth and redness of the skin). It is best to take extended-release forms to avoid this effect.

[<< Back to Safety and Effectiveness](#)

Also from AARP:

- [Information on high cholesterol from the AARP Health Guide](#)

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Prescription drug research is provided by the Oregon Health Resources Commission and OHSU's Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center. [Read more about Oregon's Prescription Drug Research.](#)

The difference between generic and brand-name drugs

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

Learn more

[Visit the FDA to learn more about generic drugs.](#)

Drug names may be confusing because the same active ingredient may be sold as one or more names. It may be sold as a generic name and as a brand name. And there may be more than one generic name and more than one brand name for the same active ingredient.

The brand name is the name given to the drug by the pharmaceutical company that was first given the right to market the drug. Because this is the only name under which the active ingredient is initially available and because the greatest amount of promotion and advertising is done under this name, it is often the name that most people recognize.

After several years (typically about five) the drug loses its protection from marketing by other companies. Other companies are then allowed to sell the active ingredient under another name. This is commonly referred to as a generic drug. Often the generic drug is sold as the name of the active ingredient by one or more companies. But it can be sold under any name.

There can be more than one brand name if the company that owns that name sells the drug in a different formulation or delivery system. The most common example of this is when the active ingredient is placed in a tablet or capsule that dissolves more slowly leading to a slower rate of entry into the body. Commonly the brand names for these different formulations are the same as the original brand name with either XL or ER added on the end.

And, for each of the drugs sold under generic names, the ER or XL may be added to the end of the name if they too have been formulated to dissolve more slowly.

Unlike over-the-counter drugs, a small number of prescription drugs are sold with more than one active ingredient in the same tablet or capsule. When this occurs the combination drug is given a new name, which often is a take off from and sounds like the name for one of the active ingredients.

It is important to note that the evidence-based research that was used as background information for this Web site did not include research on the use of combinations of drugs, whether given as a single formulation or separately.

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Talking With Your Doctor and Pharmacist About Prescription Drugs

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

If you are taking a medication or deciding to take one, AARP recommends that you ask your doctor and pharmacist a few simple questions:

1. What medical condition does the drug treat?
2. Are there other drugs (including other statins) that can be used to treat my condition?
3. If so, how do these drugs compare in safety and effectiveness?
4. How do they compare in costs?

For any medication (prescription or over-the-counter) it is also important to understand the answers to the following questions:

1. How long will I need to take the medication, and how often?
2. What are the possible side effects of the medication?
3. Will the medication conflict with other medications I am taking?
4. Should I avoid certain foods, alcohol, or dietary supplements while taking the medication?

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Oregon's Prescription Drug Research

[Allen Douma, M.D.](#)

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What's the Problem?

With the growing number of new drugs, it's difficult for a consumer and even health practitioners, to decide which medication best fits a particular need.

And, with a wide variation in the cost of drugs used to treat the same medical problem, it's hard to judge whether a higher priced drug is better or not.

As consumers, we're used to having access to good information to help us make informed choices. When we are in the market for a car, for example, we can find many sources of information, such as Consumer Reports, that compare one car to another. But, until recently, consumers and health practitioners have had little or no access to information comparing how effective drugs are in treating a particular condition, or comparing side effects.

Why Has This Information Been Lacking Before?

A major reason is that most drug research in humans is done primarily to show whether a particular drug is safe enough and effective enough to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These studies usually just compare the drug to a "sugar pill," or placebo, rather than to other drugs already available to treat a particular condition.

The Evidence-based Practice Solution

To help overcome this situation, the State of Oregon passed legislation directed at evaluating the relative effectiveness and side effects of similar medications.

Evaluations were performed by the Oregon Health and Science University's Evidence-based Practice Center, which conducted a global review of the medical literature for various classes of drugs. Following the review, the Center wrote a report for each class of drugs. Many of the articles on the AAARP Web site are based on these reports.

Comparison of drugs, such as those presented on this Web site, are providing consumers and their health care providers with information they can trust to help determine which drugs are more effective and which ones have fewer side effects.

Are We All the Same?

No. It's important to note that medical studies evaluate the overall effects of a drug on a group of people. Even when a study doesn't show that a whole group is helped or hurt, typically some people are helped and some people are hurt.

In choosing which medical treatments to recommend, health practitioners take into account a person's individual circumstance, including her or his medical history. You can use the conclusions presented here as a good foundation to start a discussion about what's right for you.

[Support Research Like This >>](#)

Important Notice: While the conclusions of the Evidence-based Practice Center represent findings that are applicable to most people, these findings may not necessarily apply to a given individual. AARP encourages you to discuss these findings with your health care providers, to find out which (if any) drug is best for you.

Choosing the Right Prescription Drug

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Allen Douma, MD

Allen Douma, MD has been a health and medical communicator for over 25 years. He is now a nationally syndicated health columnist, writer and consultant to organizations that help people attain better health through more informed decision making.

He is author of consumer health books and editor of other health education materials that are used by groups nationwide. He is also an editor and writer for a monthly health newsletter.

Doctor Douma began his medical career as a rural, solo practitioner, became an emergency room physician then later was the Medical Director of a large corporation.

Doctor Douma was Director of Health Education of the American Medical Association before becoming involved in continuing medical education of health professionals, first as the editor of medical journals and then on faculty of a medical school.

He then developed and ran telephone-based health information services that supported decision making by patients. These support services were made available to hundreds of thousand of people through their employers, health plans and disability insurance plans.

Doctor Douma co-founded an online company which developed and ran the largest online health Web site where, among other things, he was the Medical Director responsible for development of a complete health library and interactive, online groups that supported millions of people in making health and medical decisions.

Drug Cost, Safety, and Effectiveness

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- < Legislation and Elections
- AARP Public Policies
- AARP Grassroots America
- Elections
- Prescription Drugs v
 - Drug Prices
 - Changes to Medicare
 - Ongoing Advocacy
 - Discount Card
 - Drug Cost, Safety and Effectiveness**
- Social Security

Find out if you might be able to reduce your prescription drug costs by choosing a generic drug! Visit [Choosing the Right Prescription Drug](#).

Image

With the growing number of new drugs, it's more difficult for a person, or their health practitioners, to decide which medication best fits an individual's needs.

And, with a wide variation in the cost of drugs used to treat the same medical problem, it's hard to judge whether a higher priced drug is better or not.

To help overcome this situation, the State of Oregon passed legislation directed at evaluating the relative effectiveness and safety of similar medications.

Oregon can't do it alone! [Encourage your state legislature to support the Evidence-Based Research Project.](#)

- [\[link to background on the issue\]](#)
- [\[link to details on Oregon's work\]](#)
- [\[link to list of states who currently support Oregon's work\]](#)
- [\[link to how to get your state involved\]](#)
- [\[link to Choosing the Right Prescription Drug site\]](#)