Statins decrease risk of clot-related diseases

EurekAlert

ATS 2010, NEW ORLEANS? Individuals at risk for clot-related diseases may benefit from taking common cholesterol-lowering drugs known as statins, according to a study conducted by researchers at the University of Connecticut.

The results of the study will be presented at the ATS 2010 International Conference in New Orleans.

"Previous clinical studies have indicated statins may play a role in lowering the risk of these conditions, but these studies have yielded variable estimates of the effect of statin therapy," said lead author Vanjul Agarwal, M.B.B.S. "In our study, we aimed to analyze and evaluate the effect of these drugs in patients with specific conditions related to vessel blockages."

While other studies have focused on the effects of specific statin drugs, Dr. Agarwal said the current analysis sought to evaluate the effect of statins as a whole. Researchers reviewed the results of 10 studies of more than 900,000 men and women evaluating the effect of statins in preventing venous thromboembolism (VTE), clots formed in the deep veins which pose a serious risk for heart attack and stroke. Dr. Agarwal noted that the current study included all types of VTE, with a focus on deep vein thrombosis (DVT), most commonly involving clots in the lower legs, and pulmonary embolism (PE), clots that form in the primary vessels of the lungs after migrating from other areas of the body, usually the legs, pelvis or, rarely, arms. According to study results, statin use benefited patients with all types of VTE, including DVT and PE.

Both PE and DVT can be asymptomatic and therefore difficult to detect, or easy to misdiagnose. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 200,000 to 400,000 people in the U.S. have DVT and about 100,000 to 200,000 people have a PE. Nearly one-third of individuals with a PE die as a result of the condition.

Dr. Agarwal said statins are believed to decrease the risk of VTE by reducing inflammation, one of the factors involved in clot formation. "Statins have been found to have anti-inflammatory properties. Since thrombus formation involves inflammation, statins may reduce venous thrombus formation and thus, lower the odds of developing PE/DVT," she said.

Dr. Agarwal noted future randomized, controlled trials may help determine a course of statin therapy for patients most at risk for developing VTE.

"Patients at high risk for developing PE or DVT may be prescribed statins prophylactically," she said. "In these patients, regular use of statins could significantly reduce the incidence of PE and DVT."

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