

## Why Doctors Often Dismiss Drug Side Effects



Patients' concerns about drug side effects are often shrugged off by their doctors, according to a survey of 650 patients who were taking cholesterol-lowering drugs known as statins.

Statins, such as Lipitor and Zocor, are common drugs with widely known side effects that include liver damage, muscle problems, memory and mood changes, and more. In the case of muscle problems, if the side effect is not recognized it can progress to a potentially fatal condition called rhabdomyolysis.

Nonetheless, patients who responded to the survey said that they had to initiate a discussion about side effects with their doctor, and when they did:

- 47 percent said their doctors dismissed their muscle or cognitive problems, and said they were not statin-related
- 51 percent with a type of nerve pain called peripheral neuropathy said their doctors denied a connection to the drugs
- 32 percent said their doctors denied a connection between their symptoms and statins
- 29 percent said their doctors "neither endorsed nor dismissed the possibility of symptom link to statins"

Rather than attributing the patients complaints to the drugs, many doctors instead blamed the "normal aging process" or denied the symptoms entirely. Aside from not addressing the health concern in the patient, this ignorance toward a potential adverse drug reaction (ADR) means that no "adverse event report" is being given to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Side effects are already underreported by 90 to 99 percent, according to one Harvard Medical School expert, and the FDA relies heavily on such reports to gauge a drug's safety once it hits the market.

In short, the survey suggests that the FDA is missing out on a wealth of ADRs because doctors are not recognizing them in patients.

The study's authors believe that statin-related side effects are not the only one's being missed.

They suggest that many other drug side effects are also being ignored. The researchers speculated that doctors' tendencies to ignore drug side

effects may be due to the powerful ad campaigns touting medications' benefits and downplaying side effects.

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