Statins Protect Heart After Breast Cancer

Cholesterol-lowering meds may reduce cardiotoxic chemotherapy side effects in women with early breast cancer.

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Statins, the cholesterol-lowering medications, may protect women with early breast cancer from heart failure. These women are often treated with anthracyclines (chemotherapy drugs such as doxorubicin) or the monoclonal antibody trastuzumab (Herceptin), which are effective but can also damage cells of the heart muscle.

Researchers at Women's College Hospital in Toronto carried out a retrospective cohort study that included women who were at least 66 years old and received breast cancer treatment that included either anthracyclines or trastuzumab between 2007 and 2017. None had previously experienced heart failure.

For women on anthracyclines, the incidence of heart failure was 1.2% in those who took statins versus 2.9% in those who didn't. What's more, women who took statins were 55% less likely to require hospital treatment for heart failure. For women on trastuzumab, the incidence of heart failure was 2.7% in those on statins versus 3.7% in those not taking them, although the difference was not statistically significant. They were 54% less likely to require hospital treatment for heart failure.

While such observational studies cannot prove cause and effect, women being treated for breast cancer with these medications may want to consider joining a clinical trial studying statins, the researchers suggest. For more ways to protect your heart during and after cancer treatment, see Your Team.

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