Women Taking Statins Have Lower Ovarian Cancer Death Rate

Cholesterol-lowering medications were associated with at least a 40% reduction in mortality.

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Among women with ovarian cancer, taking cholesterol-lowering statin medications, particularly a type known as lipophilic statins, is associated with a lower death rate, according to a new study presented this week at the American Association for Cancer Research Virtual Annual Meeting II.

Ovarian cancer is difficult to diagnose and treat and has a five-year survival rate below 50%.

“There are no proven screening strategies, so the disease is typically diagnosed at an advanced stage, when surgery is often not an option,” said Kala Visvanathan, MD, MHS, a professor of epidemiology and oncology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center in Baltimore.

Visvanathan and her colleagues analyzed data from a Finnish national cancer registry along with prescription drug claims for 10,062 women diagnosed with ovarian cancer between 1995 and 2015. A total of 2,621 of the women (26%) had ever used statins, 80% of whom used lipophilic statins.

Statins are classified based on how they dissolve. Lipophilic statins, such as Zocor (simvastatin) and Altoprev (lovastatin), dissolve in fat, while hydrophilic statins, such as Pravachol (pravastatin) and Crestor (rosuvastatin), dissolve in water.

The women who had taken statins had a median age of 67 when they received their cancer diagnosis, while those who had never used statins had a median age of 62. In both groups, most underwent surgery for ovarian cancer and about 45% received chemotherapy. Most women who took statins had also used other medications for diabetes, high blood pressure or heart conditions.

The study authors found that the use of any statin was associated with a 40% lower risk of death compared with not using one. The risk reduction was 43% among those using lipophilic statins in particular.

Women with all subtypes of ovarian cancer, all stages of cancer at the time of diagnosis and those

taking all types of treatment had a lower mortality rate if they took statins. The lower mortality rate was similar between those who started statins before their cancer diagnosis and those who did so afterward.

“Our results provide further evidence in support of the clinical evaluation of lipophilic statins as part of the treatment of ovarian cancer,” Visvanathan said. “These drugs are appealing as they are widely used, inexpensive and well tolerated in most patients. The associated reduction in ovarian cancer mortality is promising.”

To read the study abstract, click here.

To read an AACR press release about the study, click here.

To learn more about ovarian cancer, click here.

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