

Benefits of statins far outweigh risks, says diabetes doctor

By [Marika Sboros](#)

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"Statins save lives," says Larry Distiller, director of the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology in Johannesburg, adding that they save lives that otherwise might be lost owing to diabetes.



They are "excellent drugs", he said, however, they are not meant to be "magic bullets". "All drugs have side effects," Distiller said.

However, research shows side effects are not common in statins. "For instance, muscle myalgia can be a side effect but this is easily resolved by stopping the drug or changing to another statin," Distiller said. Liver and kidney problems "are rare".

Authorities internationally agree that lifestyle change is the essential first step to beating both cardiovascular disease and diabetes, "They also agree that the benefits of statins far outweigh the risks," Distiller said.

"Statins not only lower cholesterol but have another important function to stabilise plaque or the build-up of cholesterol and other fats on the inner surface of blood vessels. If a blood vessel ruptures, it can cause a heart attack or stroke," Dr Distiller said.

The risk of using statins is marginal, considering that the rate of diabetes in SA varies between 5% and 10% of adults, depending on the population group.

The risk of diabetes is shown to be highest among Indians and coloureds, lowest in whites, with blacks in between.

When it comes to the use of food supplements, Distiller said he knew of about 76 products on the market that people liked because they are "natural". "None is proven scientifically to work, and not one is proven to be an alternative to statins," he

said.

He said that while red yeast rice and cinnamon may lower cholesterol or bring blood glucose down slightly, this is usually not enough to control heart disease and diabetes.

"On the other hand, we have drugs that have been around for 50 or 60 years. We know and understand them well and what to expect, so why go for something with minimal effects?" Distiller asked.

One problem with the natural medicines is that their proponents can only offer anecdotal evidence on the benefits of using them. "Give me six double-blind, placebo-controlled trials, published in reputable, peer-reviewed journals, proving a natural product works for diabetes, and I'll get off my high horse," he says.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

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