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December 2022: Statins vs. Supplements



The "Supplements, Placebo, or Rosuvastatin (SPORT)" study was presented at the American Heart Association scientific sessions on Nov. 6, 2022 and published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology. This research measured cholesterol reduction between rosuvastatin (Crestor®) and supplements. One of the author's conclusions is that **doctors should 'educate'** patients about the lack of benefit supplements have on decreasing the risk of heart attack.¹

This critical analysis of the SPORT study will rely on published articles by medical experts who offer opinions contrary to the authors. This is intended to stimulate further research before deciding whether to stop and/or refuse a statin prescription.

Study Design

1. SPORT was funded by AstraZeneca, the company that manufactures rosuvastatin (Crestor®). One author was an AstraZeneca employee while 6 others are paid by AstraZeneca as 'consultants'. With these conflict of interest disclosures, and given that the company has a vested stake in the results, the conclusions may be invalid or misleading due to the possibility for the introduction of bias.² Most busy practitioners rely solely on statements presented by the study authors, who are often funded by pharmaceutical companies for help in promoting their drugs.³
2. Dietary supplements are not intended to be quick fixes. The FDA has authorized health claims for the reduced risk of coronary heart disease for omega-3 fatty acids and plant sterols, however, these outcomes typically take more than **28 days** to achieve.⁴
3. The choice of low-quality, or inappropriate, supplements may have negatively skewed results. ConsumerLab reported **3 of the 5 supplements** selected for this study had failed to pass their quality reviews.⁵

*"SPORT completely misses the point of supplementation..... It's as if the study was set up for misdirection and failure of the supplements."*⁴

Andrea Wong, Ph.D, Vice President
Scientific and Regulatory Affairs
Council for Responsible Nutrition

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is an essential substance needed by every cell in the body to make hormones, vitamins, and substances that help digest foods. Elevated cholesterol may simply be a signal the body is working hard to replenish hormone levels that may be too low.³

*"Clearly, statins do what they're intended to do," said SPORT study's senior author Dr. Steve Nissen, a cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic. He said this research shows that **supplements are not effective**. "They do not promote heart health. They do not improve levels of the bad cholesterol."*⁶

However, other cardiology experts believe traditional heart disease protocols, with their emphasis on lowering cholesterol, have it all wrong. Cholesterol levels are a poor predictor of heart disease.⁷ There is no consistent correlation between lowering LDL cholesterol and reduction in heart attacks. It's a useless biomarker in terms of predicting someone's risk of heart disease and therefore we shouldn't obsess about lowering it.⁸ All of the major studies relating to statin drugs fail to prevent or treat heart disease for nearly everyone who takes them.³

*"Most people taking statins get no benefit."*⁸

Dr. Aseem Malhotra

Dietary Omega-3s

The Lyon Diet Heart Study is a randomized trial aimed at comparing a Mediterranean diet, rich in omega-3 fatty acids, to a prudent Western-type diet for reducing the rate of recurrence after a first heart attack in 605 patients. The Mediterranean-type diet group had a shocking **70% reduction** in heart attacks and **zero** sudden cardiac deaths, as compared to 8 in the Western diet group.⁹

The Scientific and Ethics Committee terminated the Lyon Diet Heart Study at 27 months, less than half-way through the planned 5 years. The reason was the benefits for those in the Mediterranean diet group were so favourable. This landmark study deserves special attention because the striking results were observed despite **no difference in cholesterol levels** between the two groups. Dr. Alexander Leaf, at the Massachusetts General Hospital, wrote in an editorial that he has encountered few cardiologists there who are aware of this study.¹⁰

*"I suspect that we are just beginning to scratch the surface of the potential biological importance to health and disease of the omega-3 class of essential fatty acids."*¹⁰

Dr. Alexander Leaf

Medical Misinformation

Finally, it is pertinent to understand that most clinical trial results may be misleading or not useful for patients. The majority of medical stories in prolific mass media advertising are inaccurate, and many exaggerate benefit and minimize the harms.¹¹

When independent researchers gain access to unreleased raw data from clinical trials, it can completely overturn the conclusions of the published paper. All industry-sponsored research should be **considered marketing** until proven otherwise.¹² Given all the recent well-documented shortcomings in medical research integrity, including that possibly half the published medical literature 'may simply be untrue', the editor of the Lancet wrote that science has taken a turn towards darkness.¹³

*"Ignorance of this problem, even at the highest levels of academic and clinical leadership, is profound."*¹¹

Dr. John Ioannidis

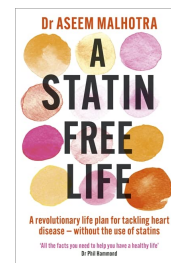
This deception in published research has led to an immense overuse of prescribed medications, which are now the **third leading cause** of death globally after cancer and heart disease.¹⁴

*"A life without drugs is possible for most of us most of the time."*¹⁴

Dr. Peter Gøtzsche

In summary, AstraZeneca funded this study in an attempt to gain market share by suggesting doctors "educate" their patients to use rosuvastatin (Crestor®) instead of supplements to decrease their risk of heart disease.

The numerous flaws and weaknesses of the SPORT study are reason enough to not only ignore its conclusions, but to dismiss it entirely as marketing.



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