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Statins link to healthy prostate

Prostate cancer is a major killer

Taking cholesterol-lowering statins may be an effective way to keep the prostate healthy, research suggests.

One study found statins were linked to reduced risk of prostate cancer, and enlargement of the organ, which can cause urinary problems.

And a second study suggested the drugs may hinder the growth of prostate cancer by reducing inflammation.

The studies were presented to a conference of the American Urological Association.

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John Neate

Prostate Cancer Charity

Statins are currently used to lower cholesterol and help prevent heart attacks and strokes.

However, there is growing evidence that the drugs also prevent cancer cells from dividing, and may even cause some cancer cells to die.

Worldwide, prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death.

The US Mayo Clinic followed 2,447 men aged 40 to 79 for nearly two decades.

They found men who took statins were three times less likely to develop prostate cancer than men who did not take the drugs.

They also found statin users were 57% less likely to develop an enlarged prostate.

Erectile dysfunction

The Mayo study also produced evidence that statins may protect men against erectile dysfunction.

This is likely to be side effect of controlling blood fats and cholesterol, high levels of which are known to increase the risk of problems getting an erection.

Researcher Dr Jennifer St Sauver said: "If you are taking a statin for a heart condition or to lower cholesterol, these studies suggest that statins could have other benefits.

"However, it is very clear we need more information before men are advised to start taking statins for their urological health."

The second study, by Duke University in North Carolina, examined tumour samples from 254 men who had their prostate removed because of cancer.

They found inflammation levels among the samples were 72% lower in men who had been taking statins.

It is thought that inflammation may fuel the growth of prostate cancer, and so lower levels may slow the speed of tumour development.

Researcher Dr Lionel Banez said: "Previous studies have shown that men taking statins seem to have a lower incidence of advanced prostate cancer, but the mechanisms by which statins might be affecting the prostate remained largely unknown.

"We found men who were on statins had a 72% reduction in risk for tumour inflammation, and we believe this might play a role in the connection between prostate cancer and statin use."

John Neate, chief executive of The Prostate Cancer Charity, said the studies were interesting, but preliminary, and more work was required before firm conclusions could be drawn.

"It is too soon to say if the results of these studies could lead to a potential breakthrough in the use of statins to reduce the risk of prostate cancer or to slow its development.

"However, the results of the studies are certainly welcome and promising enough for research to continue."