Do Doctors Dismiss Their Patients’ Reports of Adverse Side Effects from the Taking of Statin Drugs?

According to a survey of 650 patients who were taking cholesterol-lowering drugs known as statins, doctors often ignored or dismissed the concerns of their heart patients who reported adverse side-effects.

Statin drugs such as Lipitor and Zocor, are widely known to cause adverse side effects. These side-effects include liver damage, muscle and/or joint pain, memory problems, peripheral neuropathy, and mood changes. Some of these side-effects can be symptomatic of very serious problems. Muscle and/or joint pain, for instance, can be a symptom of a potentially fatal condition called rhabdomyolysis.

Nevertheless, the patients surveyed who reported these symptoms of statin drug side-effects didn’t always get a sympathetic ear from their doctors:

- 47 percent said their doctors dismissed their muscle or cognitive problems, and said they were not statin-related
- 51 percent with a type of nerve pain called peripheral neuropathy said their doctors denied a connection to the drugs
- 32 percent said their doctors denied a connection between their symptoms and statins
- 29 percent said their doctors "neither endorsed nor dismissed the possibility of symptom link to statins"

Rather than attributing the patients complaints to the drugs, many doctors blamed the “normal aging process” or denied the symptoms entirely.

Aside from not addressing the health concern of the patient, the denying of a potential adverse drug reaction (ADR) means that no “adverse event report” was sent to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). According to one Harvard Medical School expert, side effects are already underreported by 90 to 99 percent. This is bad news since the FDA relies heavily on ADRs to gauge a drug’s safety once it hits the market.

The study’s authors believe that statin-related side effects are not the only ones being missed. They suggest that many other drug side effects are also being ignored. The researchers speculated that doctors’ tendencies to ignore drug side effects may be due to the powerful ad campaigns touting medications’ benefits and downplaying their side effects.
Ray’s recommendation: If you are experiencing symptoms of a possible statin drug side-effect, insist that your doctor check it out. If you have muscle and/or joint pain, have your blood tested for creatine kinase. And everyone taking statin drugs needs to have periodic blood tests for the liver enzyme transaminase, which is elevated when the liver is being damaged. Statin drugs will prevent your liver from making Coenzyme Q-10, so CoQ-10 supplementation is a must for anyone on statin drugs!