



Rx Focus

Raising “Good Cholesterol” (HDL) Levels

High-density-lipoprotein (HDL) form of cholesterol is often referred to as “good cholesterol”. Studies have shown that as HDL levels fall below 40 mg/dL, the risk for cardiovascular disease increases sharply. The increased incidence of physical inactivity, obesity and type 2 diabetes in today’s society is contributing to low HDL levels in the population. Fortunately, there are many effective ways of increasing HDL.

The most effective way to increase HDL levels is by instituting lifestyle changes. Exercising raises HDL anywhere from 5% to 30%; losing weight raises it by about 5% to 20%; and smoking cessation increases HDL by approximately 5%. Moderate alcohol consumption has also been shown to boost HDL.

The lipid-lowering drugs that can help increase HDL levels fall into three main categories: fibrates, statins and niacin.

Fibrates (Lopid® and Tricor®) increase HDL 5% to 15%; statins (Crestor®, Lescol®, Lipitor®, Mevacor®, Pravachol®, and Zocor®) increase HDL levels 6% to 14%; and niacin products boost it anywhere from 15% to 35%. Clearly, niacin raises HDL more than any other medication on the market. In addition, niacin has a beneficial effect on the entire lipid profile and is relatively inexpensive compared to the other lipid-lowering medications.

Niacin products are currently available in three different formulations: immediate-release, extended release, and long-acting. Immediate-release products are available over-the-counter and by prescription (e.g., Niacor®). The usual daily dose is 1,500 mg to 3,000 mg given in divided doses two to three times a day. Immediate-release products are the most effective in increasing HDL levels; however, they are associated with the greatest amount of flushing. To reduce flushing, the dose should be increased slowly over several weeks. In addition, 325 mg of aspirin can be taken one half hour before the niacin dose.

The long-acting niacin products are all available over-the-counter as dietary supplements, e.g., Slo-Niacin®. They are dosed once daily. Generally, patients are started at 250mg or 500mg and then slowly increased to a maximum of 2,000mg per day. Although these products cause less flushing than the immediate-release type, they are associated with a higher risk of liver damage due to the buildup of toxic metabolites.

Extended-release products, e.g., Niaspan® are available by prescription only. They release Niacin over an 8 to 12 hour period. Dosing is started at 500mg at bedtime (with a snack). After 30 days, the dose is increased to 1000 mg for a month. Titrating may continue like this to a maximum dose of 2,000 mg per day. Extended-release niacin is associated with less flushing than immediate-release and less risk of liver damage than the long-acting formulations. It is important to note that the “no-flush” forms of niacin available over-the-counter (containing inositol hexaniacinate) are expensive and have not been shown to be as effective as regular niacin.

References:

1. “Raising HDL and Niacin Use” by Sherri K. Boehringer, Pharm.D., BCPS, *Pharmacist’s Letter, Detail-Document #200504, May 2004*

June Health Observances

National Aphasia Awareness Month – sponsored by National Aphasia Association (www.aphasia.org)

Myasthenia Gravis Awareness Month – sponsored by The Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America, Inc. (www.myasthenia.org)

National Scleroderma Awareness Month – sponsored by Scleroderma Foundation (www.scleroderma.org)

Vision Research Month – sponsored by Prevent Blindness America (www.preventblindness.org)



Industry Report

Desyrel Labeling Updated

Desyrel (trazadone hydrochloride), manufactured by Bristol-Myers Squibb, is used for the treatment of depression. In May, 2004, the FDA and Bristol-Meyers Squibb announced revisions to the Clinical Pharmacology and Precautions sections of the professional labeling for Desyrel. When trazadone is given with potent CYP3A4 inhibitors (e.g., ketoconazole, ritonavir, indinavir), there is the potential for significant increases in trazadone blood levels. This may result in an increase in adverse effects. Lower doses of trazadone should be considered when trazadone is coadministered with potent CYP3A4 inhibitors.

Conversely, it has been found that carbamazepine reduces blood levels of trazadone when the two drugs are given together. In this instance, it may be necessary to increase the trazadone dose.

Oxandrin and Warfarin Drug Interaction

On April 20, 2004, the manufacturer of Oxandrin (oxandrolone, USP), Savient Pharmaceuticals, issued a letter to healthcare professionals alerting them to an important drug interaction between Oxandrin and warfarin. When the two drugs are given together, the warfarin dose may need to be decreased significantly in order to reduce the risk of potentially serious bleeding. (Oxandrin, a synthetic derivative of testosterone, is used to promote weight gain and to relieve bone pain that is frequently associated with osteoporosis.)



New Drug Approvals

Enjuvia™ 0.625mg and 1.25mg Tablets

Approved 5/10/04

Chemical Name: Synthetic Conjugated Estrogens, B
Manufacturer: Barr Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

Therapeutic Class: Female Hormone Replacement
Approved Indications: Treatment of moderate to severe vasomotor symptoms associated with menopause.
Average Wholesale Price: Not known at this time.

Other Medications in Class: Premarin and Various Generics
Special Notes: Enjuvia™ is the only plant-derived synthetic conjugated estrogen product containing the additional active estrogenic component delta 8,9-dehydroestrone sulfate.

Vidaza Injection

Approved 5/20/04

Chemical Name: Azacitidine

Manufacturer: Pharmion Corporation

Therapeutic Class: Anti-Cancer Agent

Approved Indication: Treatment of Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS), a bone marrow disorder.

Special Notes: Vidaza is administered by IV injection and is therefore not covered on CBCA Rx plans. It also has orphan drug status - it is a medication developed to treat a condition affecting fewer than 200,000 people in the United States.



New Generic Approvals

Fluticasone Propionate Ointment, 0.005%

Approved 5/14/04

Brand Name Equivalent: Cutivate

Approved Indication: Treatment of corticosteroid-responsive skin conditions.

Manufacturer: Altana

Glyburide and Metformin HCl 1.25mg/250mg, 2.5mg/500mg and 5mg/500mg Tablets

Approved 2/18/04

Brand Name Equivalent: Glucovance

Approved Indication: Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes

Manufacturer: Ivax Pharms

Itraconazole 100mg Capsules

Approved 5/28/04

Brand Name Equivalent: Sporanox

Therapeutic Class: Antifungal Agent

Manufacturer: Eon

Ofloxacin Ophthalmic Solution. 0.3%

Approved 5/14/04

Brand Name Equivalent: Ocuflox

Approved Indication: Treatment of bacterial conjunctivitis and bacterial corneal ulcers.

Manufacturer: Hi Tech Pharma and Novex



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