



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 16, 2010

## Would You Like a Lipitor with that Cheeseburger?

For years, fast food restaurants have been under attack by consumer groups interested in imposing healthy choices on American citizens. Within the past two years, the Obama administration increased efforts to force Americans into living healthier lifestyles by way of legislation that impedes upon personal liberties. Cities across the country are passing trans fats bans, forcing retailers to look for healthier, but more expensive, alternatives. However, one group of researchers believes they have found a solution that would make both fast food restaurants and consumer groups happy: Administer cholesterol-lowering drugs with every meal.



Researchers at the Imperial College London conducted studies on the effects of statin drugs, which are believed to reduce the risk of heart attack that is increased by the intake of fats and trans fats. According to the researchers, one dose of statins would reduce the risk of heart attack by the same amount that consuming a cheeseburger and milkshake would increase it. Their recommendation? Administer a free dose of statin drugs with every meal sold.

*Science Daily* explains, "Statins reduce the amount of unhealthy 'LDL' cholesterol in the blood. A wealth of trial data has proven them to be highly effective at lowering a person's heart attack risk."

Dr. Darrel Francis of the National Heart and Lung Institute at Imperial College London, senior author of the study, writes: "Statins don't cut out all of the unhealthy effects of burgers and fries. It's better to avoid fatty food altogether. But we've worked out that in terms of your likelihood of having a heart attack, taking a statin can reduce your risk to more or less than the same degree as a fast food meal increases it."

While statin drugs are typically prescribed by a doctor, one statin is currently available over the counter in low doses. Furthermore, a natural food supplement sold in pharmacies and health food stores, [red yeast rice](#), contains monacolin K, a form of lovastatin.

Likewise, it seems that offering the statin drugs with meals would not lead to increased costs to both the restaurants administering the drugs and the consumer purchasing the meals. *Popsci.com* writes, "The cost of statins has fallen sharply in recent years such that a small statin dose would cost the vendors about the same as a packet of ketchup."

Dr. Francis contends, "It makes sense to make risk-reducing supplements available just as easily as the unhealthy condiments that are provided free of charge."

Statin drugs are safe with very few occurrences of negative side effects. According to *Science Daily*, "Statins have among the best safety profiles of any medication. A very small proportion of regular statin users experience significant side effects, with problems in the liver and kidneys reported in between 1



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in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000 people.”

The researchers do not recommend using the statin drug as an excuse for increasing the amount of fast food consumed, and in fact recommend a warning label appear on the pill’s pack emphasizing that no drug can substitute for a healthy diet, but believe that introducing statin drugs into the diet of individuals who regularly consume harmful substances can be beneficial to their health.

“When people engage in risky behaviors like driving or smoking, they’re encouraged to take measures that minimize their risk, like wearing a seatbelt or choosing cigarettes with filters. Taking a statin is a rational way of lowering some of the risks of eating a fatty meal,” asserts Dr. Francis.

When contacted by the *Washington Times*, representatives from Merck, the company which manufactures Lipitor, and those from Pfizer, which produces Zocor, failed to comment on the idea recommended by the British researchers.

Fast food giants like McDonald’s, Wendy’s, and Burger King have already succumbed to pressures from consumer groups and the government to aid in affecting healthier lifestyles by providing nutritional breakdowns on their menus and introducing reduced fat items to their menus, but have not commented on the recommendations made by the study.

It may be that food vendors will not have a choice, if the federal government favors the idea.

The *Washington Times* writes, “Next year, the fast-food giants and other restaurant chains will have to supply calories counts on menus and drive-through signs, thanks to a provision in President Obama’s health care reform legislation that even affects vending machine manufacturers. The new legislation has irked many free-market fans who see it as yet another symptom of big government and fat-bellied bureaucracy.”

Whether the statin drugs would be provided to children at the fast food counter is unclear. In July of 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics [recommended](#) that children as young as 8 should be started on statin drugs in order to lower cholesterol, but some organizations like Total Health Breakthroughs see AAP’s [recommendation](#) as “off base.”

Overall, while the Imperial College London study produced positive results in patients who consumed statin drugs, researchers encourage further studies into the potential risks of administering the drugs without medical supervision.



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