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## Cardiac drugs for Americans underused

Millions not taking  
life-saving medicine,  
research reveals

'It's a sad commentary'

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Millions of Americans with high cholesterol and heart disease aren't getting the medicines that could save their lives.

A study at 16 sites around the United States and Canada recently documented that about half the men who should be taking cholesterol-lowering drugs were, while only 35 percent of women were. The findings build on older studies showing that some of the most powerful and effective medicines developed for heart disease aren't being prescribed.

Other heart medicines are routinely being under-prescribed as well, researchers say. Aspirin, which reduces the ability of blood platelets to clot, is used about 60 percent of the time it should be. Beta blockers, which slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure, are used about 50 percent of the time. ACE inhibitors, which take some of the stress off the heart, are used roughly 40 percent of the time.

Remarkably, physicians in the new study — all at academic medical centers — had been sent letters reminding them the cholesterol medications would help their patients by cutting the risk

→ "It's a sad commentary. We have great drugs, but people are just being undertreated," said Dr. Michael Miller, director of Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center. Miller is an investigator on the study, which was released two weeks ago.

The study tracked the use of cholesterol-lowering drugs from 1994 to 1997 in a group of 825 people, all of whom had coronary artery disease. Over those years, the men's use of the medicines improved from 42 percent to 54 percent. The women's use dropped from 38 percent to 35 percent.

→ "It's atrocious," said Miller, noting that another study found that the drugs helped women more than men. "If this is what's happening at major medical centers in the U.S., what can we say about the little hospital in rural Kansas?"

### "University Citation"

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