E-ISSN 2250-0944

ISSN 2250-1150
doi: 10.48047/ijprt/15.01.194

Role of High-Dose Statins Versus Standard-Dose in Secondary Prevention of Ischemic Stroke

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Abstract:

Introduction: Ischemic stroke remains a leading cause of morbidity and mortality globally, with secondary prevention focusing on reducing recurrent strokes. Statins have been shown to have significant benefits in reducing cardiovascular events; however, the efficacy of high-dose statins compared to standard-dose in secondary prevention of ischemic stroke remains uncertain.

Objective: This study aimed to compare the effects of high-dose versus standard-dose statins on the recurrence of ischemic stroke and the prevention of adverse cardiovascular events.

Results: A total of 600 patients with a history of ischemic stroke who already taking medicine were randomly assigned to high-dose (80 mg of atorvastatin daily) and standard-dose (20 mg of atorvastatin daily) groups. After a follow-up period of 18 months, the high-dose group showed a statistically significant reduction in recurrent ischemic stroke (5.2%) compared to the standard-dose group (9.8%) ($p=0.03$). Moreover, the high-dose group exhibited lower levels of LDL cholesterol (45 mg/dL vs. 75 mg/dL; $p<0.01$).

Conclusion: High-dose statins significantly reduced recurrent ischemic stroke and LDL cholesterol levels compared to standard-dose therapy. This study suggests that high-dose statins provide superior secondary prevention benefits, filling a crucial gap in stroke management.

Keywords: ischemic stroke, high-dose statins, secondary prevention.

Introduction:

Ischemic stroke, characterized by the obstruction of cerebral blood flow, remains a significant public health issue worldwide. It is estimated that stroke is the second leading cause of death globally, with ischemic stroke accounting for about 85% of all stroke cases. Secondary prevention after an ischemic stroke is a critical focus to reduce the risk of recurrent strokes and improve long-term outcomes. Statins, or HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors, are a class of drugs commonly prescribed to lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of cardiovascular events. The role of statins in secondary prevention of ischemic stroke has been well-documented, particularly in patients with elevated cholesterol levels or established cardiovascular disease.[1-3]

Previous studies have demonstrated that statins reduce the risk of recurrent ischemic stroke through their lipid-lowering effects, anti-inflammatory properties, and stabilization of atherosclerotic plaques. The most common statins used in stroke prevention include atorvastatin, simvastatin, and rosuvastatin, with atorvastatin being the most widely prescribed due to its potency and favorable side-effect profile. High-dose statins (e.g., atorvastatin 80 mg) have shown significant benefits in reducing cardiovascular events in patients with coronary artery disease; however, their efficacy in preventing recurrent ischemic stroke has not been fully explored in comparison to standard-dose statins.[4-7]

While statins have long been considered a cornerstone of secondary stroke prevention, the question remains whether high-dose statin therapy offers additional benefits over standard doses in reducing the incidence of recurrent ischemic strokes. Some studies suggest that high-dose statins may offer greater reductions in LDL cholesterol levels and improved outcomes in stroke prevention, while others caution against potential adverse effects, including muscle pain, liver dysfunction, and

increased risk of hemorrhagic stroke. The primary objective of this randomized controlled trial was to investigate the comparative effectiveness of high-dose atorvastatin versus standard-dose atorvastatin in secondary stroke prevention.[8-10]

Recent studies have shown that higher doses of statins provide more significant reductions in LDL cholesterol levels, which is a well-established risk factor for ischemic stroke. However, the benefits of this increased lipid reduction in preventing recurrent strokes remain unclear. Additionally, it is essential to assess the safety of high-dose statins, particularly in the context of stroke patients who may have additional comorbidities such as hypertension, diabetes, or renal insufficiency, which could exacerbate side effects.

A growing body of evidence has emerged to support the hypothesis that high-dose statins may provide superior protection against recurrent ischemic strokes compared to standard doses. However, there is a lack of large-scale randomized trials directly comparing high-dose statins to standard-dose therapy specifically in the ischemic stroke population. This study aims to fill this gap by providing robust clinical data on the efficacy and safety of high-dose versus standard-dose atorvastatin in the secondary prevention of ischemic stroke.

Recent trials have also emphasized the potential role of statins beyond their lipid-lowering effects, exploring their anti-inflammatory, plaque-stabilizing, and endothelial-protective properties. These additional mechanisms may play a crucial role in preventing stroke recurrence, especially in patients with complex atherosclerotic disease. Therefore, understanding the broader effects of high-dose statins could enhance our ability to prevent recurrent strokes and reduce long-term disability in affected patients.

In conclusion, the current study seeks to provide important insights into the effectiveness of high-dose statins in the secondary prevention of ischemic stroke. By directly comparing high-dose atorvastatin to standard-dose atorvastatin, this trial aims to evaluate both the clinical outcomes and safety profiles, ultimately contributing to evidence-based recommendations for stroke management.

Methodology:

This Prospective Cohort Study was conducted at Allama Iqbal Medical College between January 2023 and December 2024, involving 600 patients with a history of ischemic stroke. Eligible participants were aged 45 to 75 years and had experienced an ischemic stroke within the past 6 months. Patients were randomly divided into 2 groups who were already taking high-dose atorvastatin (80 mg daily) or standard-dose atorvastatin (20 mg daily) for 18 months follow up period.

Sample size calculation was performed using Epi Info software (version 7.2), with an estimated 80% power and a significance level of 0.05. The sample size was based on previous studies showing a 20% reduction in recurrent stroke with high-dose statins. Inclusion criteria included patients with a diagnosis of ischemic stroke, stable vital signs, and informed consent capacity. Exclusion criteria included a history of hemorrhagic stroke, active malignancy, or severe renal or hepatic dysfunction.

The primary endpoint was the recurrence of ischemic stroke during the study period, while secondary endpoints included major cardiovascular events, LDL cholesterol levels, and adverse drug reactions. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 25), with continuous variables compared using independent t-tests and categorical variables analyzed with chi-square tests. Kaplan-Meier survival curves were used for recurrence rates.

Results:

Demographic Data Table1:

Variable	**High-Dose Group (n=300)**	**Standard-Dose Group (n=300)**
Age (mean ± SD)	61.5 ± 8.2	62.3 ± 7.9
Male/Female (%)	72/28	70/30

Variable	**High-Dose Group (n=300)**	**Standard-Dose Group (n=300)**
Hypertension (%)	82%	80%
Diabetes Mellitus (%)	48%	46%

Table 2: Recurrence of Ischemic Stroke

Group	**Recurrence Rate (%)**	**p-value**
High-Dose Atorvastatin (80 mg)	5.2%	0.03
Standard-Dose Atorvastatin (20 mg)	9.8%	

Table 3: LDL Cholesterol Levels (mg/dL)

Group	**LDL Cholesterol (mean ± SD)**	**p-value**
High-Dose Atorvastatin (80 mg)	45 ± 8	<0.01
Standard-Dose Atorvastatin (20 mg)	75 ± 12	

Table 4: Adverse Effects

Group	**Muscle Pain (%)**	**Liver Dysfunction (%)**	**p-value**
High-Dose Atorvastatin (80 mg)	12%	6%	0.12
Standard-Dose Atorvastatin (20 mg)	8%	4%	

Discussion:

The results of this study provide strong evidence that high-dose atorvastatin significantly reduces the recurrence of ischemic stroke compared to standard-dose atorvastatin. In the high-dose group, the recurrence rate was reduced to 5.2%, significantly lower than the 9.8% observed in the standard-dose group (p=0.03). This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that aggressive lipid-lowering therapies can effectively reduce the risk of recurrent cerebrovascular events.[11-12]

The reduction in LDL cholesterol levels observed in the high-dose group further supports the hypothesis that intensive statin therapy provides superior cardiovascular protection. LDL

cholesterol levels were significantly lower in the high-dose group (45 mg/dL) compared to the standard-dose group (75 mg/dL), which is consistent with the established role of statins in lowering lipid levels and improving vascular health.[12-15]

While the incidence of adverse effects such as muscle pain and liver dysfunction was higher in the high-dose group, the difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that the benefits of high-dose statins outweigh the potential risks in the secondary prevention of ischemic stroke. These findings are important for clinicians considering the balance between efficacy and safety in stroke prevention.[16-18]

The study's results are particularly relevant in the context of ongoing debates regarding the optimal intensity of statin therapy for secondary prevention. Previous research has shown that high-dose statins reduce cardiovascular events in patients with coronary artery disease, but their role in stroke prevention has been less clear. This study helps to clarify the benefit of high-dose statins specifically for secondary ischemic stroke prevention, addressing a key gap in stroke management.

Moreover, this trial supports the growing body of evidence suggesting that statins may have beneficial effects beyond cholesterol reduction, including stabilizing atherosclerotic plaques and improving endothelial function. These mechanisms may contribute to the reduction in stroke recurrence observed in the high-dose group.[19-20]

In conclusion, this randomized controlled trial demonstrates the superiority of high-dose atorvastatin over standard-dose atorvastatin in the secondary prevention of ischemic stroke. By reducing both LDL cholesterol levels and the recurrence of ischemic stroke, high-dose statins offer a promising strategy for improving long-term outcomes in stroke patients.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, high-dose atorvastatin significantly reduces recurrent ischemic stroke and LDL cholesterol levels compared to standard-dose therapy. This study addresses a critical gap in secondary stroke prevention, offering valuable insights into optimizing statin therapy. Future

research should focus on long-term outcomes and the safety of high-dose statins in diverse stroke populations.

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