



# Jeff Donovan MD PhD FRCPC

*Dermatologist, specializing in hair loss*

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## INFORMATION ON ATORVASTATIN (LIPITOR)

### What is Atorvastatin (Lipitor)?

- This is a medication used to reduce LDL cholesterol and sometimes to help other cholesterol numbers as well (HDL, triglycerides).
- Patients with high cholesterol who use Lipitor with improved diet and increased exercise will reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease.
- It may also have anti-inflammatory properties which are used in some types of hair loss.

### How is it Atorvastatin (Lipitor) prescribed?

- The dose is 10-20 mg to start and increased to 40 or 80 mg if needed.
- The medication is taken once per day and can be taken with or without food.

### Who should not take Atorvastatin (Lipitor)?

- Patients who have liver disease sometimes are not candidates for this medication. If you have liver disease of any kind, Dr. Donovan will advise if there are any issues for you.
- Patients who are pregnant or breast feeding.
- Patients who are allergic to the drug or component of the drug

### Do any medications interact with Atorvastatin (Lipitor)?

- Yes, many, many medications interact with Atorvastatin. Dr. Donovan will review if your current medications are of issue. Be sure to always check with your pharmacist when starting any new medications.
- Cyclosporine, itraconazole and clarithromycin, spironolactone are examples but many others exist as well.

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### What are the side effects of Atorvastatin (Lipitor)?

- **Muscle issues, including sore muscles, weakness and increased muscle enzymes in the blood.** If this occurs, the drug should be stopped and Dr. Donovan advised.
- **Increased liver enzymes.** This can occur with use of Atorvastatin but fortunately, this is not common. However, for this reason blood tests are needed before starting and in some cases also after starting atorvastatin (Lipitor) around month number 3. Increased liver enzymes of concern occur in 0.2 % of patients using 10-20 mg doses, and in 0.6 % of patients using the 40 mg dose and 2.3 % of patients using the 80 mg dose.
- **Runny nose, joint pains, diarrhea and urinary tract infections have been reported in clinical trials but are not common.**
- **Increased risk of diabetes.** New data suggests a small risk for increased blood sugars and “Hemoglobin A1c” in users of this medication. The risk appears to be small but it may be something that your doctors or Dr Donovan will follow. It is currently thought that statin drugs cause diabetes only in patients that were en route to developing diabetes and cause the diabetes about three months earlier than they would have.
- **Increased risk of memory loss and confusion.** These side effects appear to be uncommon and reversible and continues to be studied by the medical field.

### Besides cholesterol testing, do I need any other blood tests before starting?

- AST, ALT, bilirubin, creatinine, urinalysis, glucose and hemoglobin A1c, and CK

### What blood tests are needed after starting for monitoring?

Years ago, physicians routinely tested liver enzymes in patients after starting this medication. Now, it is done on a case by case basis. Dr. Donovan will advise you if he feels you should have blood tests in the weeks and months after starting. If so, it may include one or more of the following: AST, ALT, bilirubin, creatinine, urinalysis, glucose and hemoglobin A1c, and CK

### Under what situations should I stop Atorvastatin (Lipitor) ?

Atorvastatin (Lipitor) should be stopped and medical attention sought immediately if:

- You feel unwell
- You have stomach pain
- You have dark urine
- You have nausea and vomiting
- You feel confused
- Stop the drug if you develop sore throat, fever, pallor, bruising, or jaundice (yellowing of the skin), abdominal pain as these may be indications of serious problems
- If you develop significant muscle soreness or weakness.