

What is Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH)?

FH is an inherited condition causing high cholesterol. High cholesterol causes heart disease.

How is FH treated?

Cholesterol is lowered by one or a combination of the following medications:

- **Statins** are the medication most commonly prescribed. They work by reducing the amount of cholesterol your body makes.
- **Ezetimibe** is often used in combination with a statin. It works by decreasing cholesterol absorption in the small intestine.
- Less often prescribed are **bile acid sequestrants (BAS)**. BAS bind to bile acids in the intestine and prevent them from being reabsorbed into the blood. In order to produce more bile acids, the liver converts more cholesterol into bile acids, which lowers the level of cholesterol in the blood.

BAS:

- only reduce cholesterol by a small amount
- may cause intestinal problems such as constipation
- come as a gritty powder that must be mixed with a liquid before ingestion.

Statins and **ezetimibe** are absorbed into the bloodstream and have not been proven to be safe for the unborn and breastfeeding child so they should not be taken during this period.

BAS are the only safe medication to take during pregnancy and breastfeeding as they are not absorbed into the bloodstream.

Women taking statins/ezetimibe

If you are taking a statin/ezetimibe it is important you use birth control consistently to avoid falling pregnant while on these medications.

What birth control should I use?

Low oestrogen oral contraceptive pills, intra-uterine devices (IUDs) and barrier techniques (condom, diaphragm etc.) are the preferred methods of birth control. The latter two methods are preferable for women older than 35 years.

What if I become pregnant while taking a statin/ezetimibe?

If you have just found out you are pregnant, you should stop taking your statin/ezetimibe and speak with your obstetrician and the doctor managing your cholesterol.

Please be reassured that the likelihood of any problem with the baby is very low.

I'm thinking of getting pregnant

It is recommended you stop taking your statin/ezetimibe three months before trying to conceive and remain off them during pregnancy and until you have stopped breastfeeding.

Not drinking alcohol and not smoking during this period is also recommended. NEVER smoking is the best option.

You will require additional information and medical support if you have:

- heart disease or had a stroke
- homozygous/compound heterozygous FH
- a partner also with FH or high cholesterol.

Cholesterol levels during pregnancy

As soon as you stop taking your statin/ezetimibe your cholesterol level will rise.

Additionally, cholesterol levels naturally rise in most women during pregnancy.

This double increase means that you may end up with extremely high cholesterol during pregnancy.

How can I keep my cholesterol under control during pregnancy?



- A heart healthy lifestyle; be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs.

Nutritious foods include: vegetables, fruit, wholegrain cereals, lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes, beans, reduced fat dairy and/or their alternatives.

Also drink plenty of water.

Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugars.

You may need to speak with a dietitian.

- A BAS may be recommended.
- Some women with extremely high cholesterol may require lipoprotein apheresis (similar to renal dialysis) to lower their cholesterol.

Should I breastfeed?

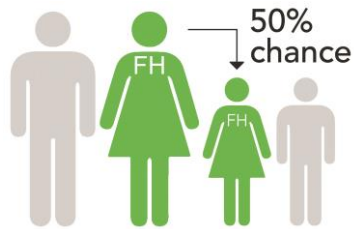
Everyone must decide what is best for their family. Most doctors advise limiting breastfeeding because this allows you to resume taking your statin/ezetimibe.

For each pregnancy you will be off your statin/ezetimibe for a substantial period of time; at least three months before becoming pregnant, the pregnancy and breastfeeding.

If you remain off your statin/ezetimibe longer than necessary, there is a possibility that you will develop heart disease.

Will my children inherit FH?

If you have heterozygous FH, then each child has a 50% (or 1 in 2) chance of inheriting FH.



Your children should be tested around the age of 10 to see if they have inherited FH.

I'm having trouble getting pregnant; should I consider infertility treatments?

Many infertility treatments increase cholesterol dramatically.

If you are thinking about infertility treatments, it is important you speak with your doctor.

Early Diagnosis
Early Treatment
Saves Hearts



FH Australasia Network

- Email: fhwa@health.wa.gov.au
- Website: <http://www.athero.org.au/fh>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FHAustralasiaNetworkandSupportGroup>
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Women and Pregnancy

**Familial
Hypercholesterolaemia**