



# Effective Health Care

## Herbal Therapies for Cholesterol Reduction Nomination Summary Document

### Results of Topic Selection Process & Next Steps

- The topic of herbal therapies for cholesterol reduction is not feasible for a full systematic review due to the limited data available for a review at this time.

### Topic Description

**Nominator:** Individual

**Nomination Summary:** The nominator is interested in the comparative effectiveness of alternative (herbal) treatments for reducing cholesterol levels compared to standard medications. The nominator specifically mentions red yeast rice as an alternative compared to statins and fibrates.

**Key Questions from Nominator:** 1. What is the effectiveness of alternative therapy versus regular medication in reducing cholesterol?

### Considerations

- The topic meets all EHC Program appropriateness and importance criteria. (For more information, see <http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/submit-a-suggestion-for-research/how-are-research-topics-chosen/>.)
- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and of the multiple risk factors for coronary artery disease (CAD), hyperlipidemia is one of the most modifiable.
- Very few studies have been conducted on the comparative effectiveness of herbal treatments compared to pharmacologic treatment for cholesterol reduction. Therefore, this topic is not feasible for a full systematic review due to the limited data available for a review at this time.
- One herbal supplement specifically mentioned in the nomination is red yeast rice. In 2007, the FDA issued warning letters that dietary supplements containing red yeast rice were found to contain lovastatin, a prescription drug approved in the US as a treatment for high cholesterol. The FDA states that the red yeast rice products are a threat to health because the possibility exists that lovastatin can cause severe muscle problems leading to kidney impairment. This risk is greater in patients who take

higher doses of lovastatin or who take lovastatin and other medications that increase the risk of muscle adverse reactions including the antidepressant nefazodone, antibiotics, drugs to treat fungal infections and HIV infections, and other cholesterol-lowering medications. The FDA declared that the red yeast rice products are unapproved new drugs and are marketed in violation of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.