

# IJN: Cholesterol management lowers heart attack risk

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Debunking the belief that statins have no effect on cardiovascular disease, a senior consultant cardiologist has advised those with high cholesterol and coronary heart disease to take the drug to lower blood cholesterol.

Datuk Seri Dr Azhari Rosman (pic) of the National Heart Institute (IJN) said there was a need for such patients to lower cholesterol in order to reduce their risk of getting a heart attack or stroke.

"If the likelihood of having a heart attack or stroke is high, cholesterol-lowering drugs do have benefits. But if the risk is low, the benefit may be less.

"The doctor must assess the risks and benefits of treatment.

"The one most at risk of the disease would benefit most from taking statin," he said during the launch of the *All You Need to Know about Cholesterol* handbook yesterday.

Dr Azhari was asked to comment on the findings by *BMJ Open Journal*, as reported by the British-based *The Telegraph* last year, which said a review of research involving nearly 70,000 people found that there was no link between "bad" cholesterol and premature deaths of those aged over 60 for cardiovascular disease.

The research found that 92% of people with high cholesterol level lived longer.

Dr Azhari also said the study was just a pooled review of many studies with diverse backgrounds, including those who took and did not take cholesterol-lowering medication.

The interpretation was not as accurate as a randomised controlled trial and had serious limitations, he noted.

The handbook, prepared by IJN and Pfizer Malaysia, aims to help Malaysians understand the silent killer and manage their cholesterol.

Dr Azhari said "statins are not only used to lower cholesterol, but also help improve the condition of plaque in the arteries so that it is less likely to rupture".

"It can also shrink the plaque over a period of time, as well as reduce inflammation and the risk of a heart attack," he said.

During the Myth or Fact Challenge at the event, IJN consultant cardiologist Dr Emily Tan said cholesterol by itself was not bad, but it must be looked at in a patient's overall health.

"There are other reasons people get heart disease, such as if they have diabetes or smoke," she said.

"However, having too much cholesterol in the blood is a bad thing as it can cause the arteries to harden and become narrow over time, increasing the risk of heart disease," she added.

IJN CEO Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Azhari Yakub said two out of five Malaysians did not know they had high cholesterol.

"This is 38.6% or an estimated 7.8 million Malaysians," he said in his speech read out by IJN chief clinical officer Datuk Aizai Azan Abdul Rahim.

"High cholesterol and its associated coronary disease is a silent killer, which does not have any warning signs or symptoms until an adverse event happens.

"Considering these alarming figures, it is imperative that more initiatives driving awareness and understanding about cholesterol management are done," he said.

