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For people suffering from high cholesterol the common treatment is to take one of several Statins; a class of drug proven to lower cholesterol levels. However, statins are increasingly being associated with adverse effects such as muscle cramps and loss of energy. Dr Richard Karas of Tufts Medical Center, Boston, MA, has stated that in the real world, although as yet unproven in a study, statin-associated muscle problems are a common and difficult problem for clinicians.

In a study held at the University of Pennsylvania scientists have discovered that the Chinese Medicine Red Yeast Rice (Hong Qu) has similar benefits to the statins but without the risk of the side effects.

Red yeast rice has been used in China for patients with circulatory and digestive problems for centuries and has been shown to lower plasma LDL (low-density lipoprotein) levels.

"Statin-associated myalgia [muscle pain] is an important clinical problem that will likely become more prevalent owing to the ever-expanding indications for statin use," write lead author Dr Steven Halbert (University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA) and colleagues in the January 15, 2010 issue of the *American Journal of Cardiology*. "Although no definitive conclusions could be drawn, our data showed that red yeast rice achieved clinically significant levels of LDL-cholesterol reduction in a population with previous statin intolerance."

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