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An apple a day really does keep the doctor away, scientists say

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Courtesy of the British Medical Journal
and World Science staff

An apple a day for all adults aged 50 and over would prevent or delay around 8,500 vascular deaths such as heart attacks and strokes every year in the U.K. alone, a study indicates.

The effect is similar to giving statins, or cholesterol-lowering drugs, to everyone over 50 years who isn't already taking them, says the study in the Christmas edition of *The British Medical Journal*.

The researchers conclude that the Victorian-era proverb "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" is able to match more widespread use of modern medicine, probably with fewer side effects. The authors stressed that no one currently taking statins should stop, although by all means eat more apples.

Using a mathematical model, the University of Oxford researchers analyzed the effect on the most common causes of vascular mortality of prescribing either a statin a day to those not already taking one or an apple a day to everyone aged over 50 years in the U.K.

They calculated that offering a daily statin to 17.6 million more adults would reduce the annual number of vascular deaths by 9,400, while offering a daily apple to 70 percent of the total U.K. population aged over 50 years (22 million people) would avert 8,500 vascular deaths.

"This study shows that small dietary changes as well as increased use of statins at a population level may significantly reduce vascular mortality in the U.K.," write the authors.