I am trying to lower my cholesterol. I’m a vegan, I exercise, I’m normal weight, and I don’t smoke or drink. Though my cholesterol readings have improved, the doctor is still not satisfied. I’m especially concerned because my father died at age 51 of a heart attack, even though he was apparently quite healthy until then. My doctor wants to put me on Zocor. What do you think?

Well, you seem to be doing all the things a person can do to live a healthy life. You definitely have taken care of the lifestyle component of health. One of the most difficult things for Adventists to realize is that we are broken; we can’t work out all of our own health problems and live forever any more than we can work out our own salvation. That doesn’t mean giving up. You are definitely better off than you would be if you lived a reckless lifestyle.

I would recommend you take the Zocor your doctor has prescribed. If your lifestyle changes had worked sufficiently, you might not have needed it. However, it seems that at least part of your problem is very likely genetic.

Zocor belongs to the statin group of medications used principally to lower cholesterol levels (by inhibiting the production of cholesterol). A very strong base of evidence shows increased survival among patients using these statin medications. No medication is without potential side effects, and you need to discuss these with your doctor. However, some other interesting side effects have been reported about the statin medications.

In the November 11, 2000, Lancet, a large study on about 60,000 people found those on statin had a substantial reduction in the incidence of dementia and loss of memory. In fact, the group had better abstract thinking abilities than those not on statin. This effect was seen with the statin group of cholesterol-lowering medications, but not with other kinds of cholesterol-lowering medications. This lowering of risk amounted to 70 percent for Alzheimer’s disease. This study was not a randomized study, so we await further evidence. If true, it is a nice additive effect to an already-proven benefit in regard to heart disease protection.

One of the statins – Baycol (cerivastatin) – was withdrawn from the market because of muscle breakdown and resultant kidney problems, but the other statins have not been shown to have side effects as significant. If the doctor feels you should take the medication, a vast body of compelling evidence exists to support its use.