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Authors
Toyama, Kensuke
Sugiyama, Seigo
Oka, Hideki
et al.

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A Pilot Study: The Beneficial Effects of Combined Statin-exercise Therapy on Cognitive Function in Patients with Coronary Artery Disease and Mild Cognitive Decline

Kensuke Toyama¹,²⁴, Seigo Sugiyama¹,²⁵, Hideki Oka⁶, Mari Hamada⁶, Yuri Iwasaki¹, Eiji Horio³, Taku Rokutanda², Shinichi Nakamura³, Joshua M. Spin³,⁴, Philip S. Tsao³,⁴ and Hisao Ogawa¹

Abstract

Objective  Hypercholesterolemia, a risk factor in cognitive impairment, can be treated with statins. However, cognitive decline associated with “statins” (HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors) is a clinical concern. This pilot study investigated the effects of combining statins and regular exercise on cognitive function in coronary artery disease (CAD) patients with prior mild cognitive decline.

Methods  We recruited 43 consecutive CAD patients with mild cognitive decline. These patients were treated with a statin and weekly in-hospital aerobic exercise for 5 months. We measured serum lipids, exercise capacity, and cognitive function using the mini mental state examination (MMSE).

Results  Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels were significantly decreased, and maximum exercise capacity (workload) was significantly increased in patients with CAD and mild cognitive decline after treatment compared with before. Combined statin-exercise therapy significantly increased the median (range) MMSE score from 24 (22-25) to 25 (23-27) across the cohort (p<0.01). Changes in body mass index (BMI) were significantly and negatively correlated with changes in the MMSE. After treatment, MMSE scores in the subgroup of patients that showed a decrease in BMI were significantly improved, but not in the BMI-increased subgroup. Furthermore, the patients already on a statin at the beginning of the trial displayed a more significant improvement in MMSE score than statin-naïve patients, implying that exercise might be the beneficial aspect of this intervention as regards cognition. In a multivariate logistic regression analysis adjusted for age >65 years, sex, and presence of diabetes mellitus, a decrease in BMI during statin-exercise therapy was significantly correlated with an increase in the MMSE score (odds ratio: 4.57, 95% confidence interval: 1.05-20.0; p<0.05).

Conclusion  Statin-exercise therapy may help improve cognitive dysfunction in patients with CAD and pre-existing mild cognitive decline.

Key words: statins, exercise, cognition, coronary artery disease

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Introduction

The number of dementia cases in developed countries is dramatically increasing, and rising health care costs related to dementia are a large social problem (1). Cardiovascular diseases, as well as their risk factors, are strongly associated with cognitive decline (2). Development of effective therapeutic strategies for cognitive dysfunction in coronary artery disease (CAD) patients is therefore an urgent issue.

Statins are effective in reducing cardiovascular events and are recommended for secondary prevention in all patients who have CAD and tolerate statin therapy (3). However, the US Food and Drug Administration and several reviews have raised concern regarding potential adverse cognitive effects associated with statins (4-7). Exercise therapy is recommended as a protective factor for cognition in older adults, as well as CAD patients (8).

We previously reported that exercise combined with statins is clinically useful and an effective treatment for CAD patients (9-11). However, the effects of statin-exercise therapy on cognitive function in CAD patients have not been fully clarified.

In the present study, we examined whether or not statin-exercise therapy is beneficial for managing cognitive decline in patients with CAD and pre-existing mild cognitive impairment.

Study population

We performed a prospective observational study to investigate the clinical significance of regular exercise and statin treatment in CAD patients with mild cognitive decline. We recruited 43 consecutive CAD patients with mild cognitive decline (mini mental state examination [MMSE] score <25). All patients were referred to our hospital for low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol-lowering therapy with statins in order to achieve guideline goals and underwent cardiac rehabilitation therapy at the Division of Cardiology, Hitoyoshi Medical Center between April 2011 and August 2014. Patients who could not perform cardiopulmonary exercises or undergo MMSE tests during the study period were excluded.

Study design

The patients performed weekly 30-minute in-hospital aerobic exercises on ergometer-equipped bicycles. The aerobic exercises were based on anaerobic thresholds that were evaluated with cardiopulmonary exercise tests. Patients performed the exercises for 5 months. An experienced registered exercise rehabilitation instructor instructed all of the patients regarding the performance of 30-minute walking or cycle ergometer exercises at home to a Borg scale rating of 12-13. All of the patients were treated with one of a variety of statins to achieve guideline goal levels for LDL (<70 mg/dL). Thirty statin-naive subjects were started on a de novo statin. Ten patients with pre-existing statin treatment remained on their current dose and statin, two patients were switched to similar-intensity therapy, and one patient had their dose increased. The protocol of the Hitoyoshi Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Study (HARVEST), which is evaluating the efficacy of exercise therapy on patients with cardiovascular disease and is registered with the UMIN protocol registration system (identification number UMIN 000015544; https://upload.umin.ac.jp/cgi-open-bin/ctr/ctr.cgi?function=brows&action=brows&reptno=R000018044&type=summary&language=E), was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Hitoyoshi Medical Center in Kumamoto, Japan. A signed consent form was obtained from each patient. The methods in this study were performed in accordance with approved guidelines.

Home exercise instructions

All of the patients were instructed to perform exercises at home under the supervision of a registered exercise rehabilitation instructor, as previously described (9). The patients maintained personal healthcare logs in which they recorded their daily blood pressure, body weight, and exercises that were performed at home. Patients who did not complete the home exercises received repeat instruction and were asked again to perform the training.

Blood biochemistry

Venous blood samples were collected before the exercise test.

Cognitive assessment

The MMSE test, a brief 30-point questionnaire, was conducted by a single trained technician at baseline and at the end of treatment. Subjects who scored below 25 were considered to have mild cognitive impairment.

Cardiopulmonary exercise test

An individually optimized 5-, 10-, 15-, and 20-Watt ramp-up exercise protocol on an electromagnetically braked cycle ergometer (Well Bike BE-250; Cat Eye Co., Osaka, Japan) with blood pressure and heart rate monitoring was performed in a temperature-controlled room (23-25°C), as previously described (9). Respiratory gas was sampled from a mouthpiece, and minute ventilation, carbon dioxide in expired air, oxygen in inspired air, ventilatory equivalent for carbon dioxide, and ventilatory equivalent for oxygen were measured for each breath using a breath-by-breath gas analyzer (AE310S; Minato Medical Science, Osaka, Japan). Peak oxygen uptake, anaerobic threshold, and maximum workload were evaluated at baseline and at the end of treatment.

Statistical analyses

We used the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine whether the
Table 1. Patients’ Characteristics.

| All patients (n = 43) |
|-----------------------|
| Age (years)           | 71 ± 8 |
| Male, n (%)           | 35 (81) |
| Angina pectoris, n (%)| 9 (21) |
| Myocardial infarction, n (%) | 29 (67) |
| Heart failure, n (%)  | 11 (26) |
| Cerebral stroke, n (%)| 3 (7)  |
| Risk factors          |        |
| Hypertension, n (%)   | 32 (74) |
| Diabetes mellitus, n (%) | 15 (35) |
| Dyslipidemia, n (%)   | 34 (79) |
| Chronic kidney disease, n (%) | 20 (47) |
| Current smoking, n (%)| 5 (12)  |
| Medical therapies     |        |
| Aspirin, n (%)        | 42 (98) |
| Anticoagulant, n (%)  | 9 (21)  |
| Angiotensin II receptor blocker, n (%) | 13 (30) |
| Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor, n (%) | 23 (53) |
| Diuretic, n (%)       | 12 (28) |
| Calcium channel blockers, n (%) | 20 (47) |
| β-blockers, n (%)     | 24 (56) |
| Nitrates, n (%)       | 9 (21)  |
| Oral hypoglycemic agents, n (%) | 6 (14) |
| Insulin, n (%)        | 4 (9)   |

Data are mean ± SD or n (%).

Effect of statin-exercise therapy on the cognitive function and other parameters

Five months of combined statin-exercise therapy significantly improved the cognitive decline on average, as measured by the MMSE test (Figure A). Table 2 shows the effects of statin-exercise therapy on various parameters. The cardiopulmonary function, as measured by the maximum workload capacity, significantly improved after treatment. The average total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels were significantly decreased after treatment compared with before treatment.

Effect of pre-treatment statin and statin types on cognitive outcome

Thirteen patients were on pre-existing statin therapy at the beginning of the statin-exercise therapy period. Overall, this subgroup experienced little-to-no changes in their statin regimen at the initiation of the trial. These patients displayed a significant increase in the MMSE score (p<0.009), which was not observed in the statin-naïve patients (Figure B). Notably, the average BMI was not markedly different between the pre-existing statin treatment and statin-naïve groups after treatment (25.8±4.2 to 26.1±3.6 kg/m², p=0.521; 23.6±3.2 to 23.5±3.2 kg/m², p=0.611, respectively).

Further, the mean (range) MMSE score of lipophilic statins users (n=26) increased significantly from 24 (22-25) to 25 (23-28) (p=0.005). In contrast, hydrophilic statin users (n=17) saw no marked changes (25 [22-26] to 24 [23-27], p=0.217).

Baseline diabetes mellitus and improvement of the cognitive function

Fifteen diabetic CAD patients were included in this study. Six diabetic patients were taking oral glycemic agents, while four separate patients were taking insulin (Table 1). While the anti-diabetic agents might have had effects on BMI and cognition, a univariate logistic regression analysis showed that neither oral hypoglycemic agents nor insulin correlated with an increase in the MMSE score (Table 3). However, the baseline fasting blood glucose level correlated with a decrease in the BMI (odds ratio: 1.85, p=0.489; and 0.53, p=0.601, respectively). Further, although the baseline fasting blood glucose level, HbA1c level, and oral hypoglycemic agents were not associated with cognitive response (Table 3), a univariate logistic regression analysis showed that the presence of diabetes mellitus (DM) was significantly negatively correlated with an increase in the MMSE score (odds ratio: 0.24, p<0.05). The MMSE in non-diabetic CAD patients significantly increased after treatment compared with before treatment, with no marked changes in the diabetic patients (Figure C).

Effects of statin-exercise therapy-associated changes in BMI on cognitive decline

Although the average BMI did not change markedly across the study group (Table 2), changes in the BMI were
inversely correlated with changes in the MMSE (Figure D, Table 4). After adjusting for age, sex, and the presence of hypertension, DM, and cerebral stroke, a multivariate linear regression analysis showed that changes in the BMI were still significantly associated with changes in the MMSE (Table 5). Furthermore, there was a significant inter-subgroup difference in changes in the BMI between the MMSE-increased (ΔMMSE >1.0) and the MMSE-decreased groups (ΔMMSE ≤1.0) (Table 6).

The MMSE in the BMI-decreased group (ΔBMI = [BMI after 5 months] - [baseline BMI]; ΔBMI <0.0) was significantly elevated after treatment compared with before treat-
Table 2. Effects of Statin-exercise Treatment on Various Parameters.

| Parameter                                      | All patients (n=43) | Baseline | 5 months | p value |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Systolic blood pressure, mmHg                   | 120 ± 14            | 122 ± 15 |          | 0.298   |
| Diastolic blood pressure, mmHg                  | 69 ± 9              | 70 ± 10  |          | 0.451   |
| Body mass index, kg/m²                          | 24.3 ± 3.6          | 24.3 ± 3.5|          | 0.966   |
| Abdominal circumference, cm                     | 88 (84 to 94)       | 87 (81 to 93) |          | 0.070   |
| Anaerobic threshold, mL/min/kg                  | 10.3 ± 2.0          | 10.7 ± 2.0|          | 0.238   |
| Peak oxygen uptake, mL/min/kg                   | 15.7 ± 3.9          | 16.4 ± 3.0|          | 0.067   |
| Maximum work load, max Watts                    | 77 (53 to 95)       | 82 (63 to 97) |          | 0.003   |
| Left ventricular ejection fraction, %           | 59.1 ± 11.8         | 61.8 ± 7.8|          | 0.086   |
| Hemoglobin, g/dL                                | 13.7 ± 1.5          | 13.7 ± 1.5|          | 0.719   |
| Albumin, g/dL                                   | 3.9 (3.5 to 4.1)    | 4.2 (4.0 to 4.6) |          | < 0.001 |
| Estimated glomerular filtration rate, mL/min/1.73 m² | 58.9 (53.4 to 66.4) | 59.7 (51.3 to 67.9) |      | 0.915   |
| Total cholesterol, mg/dL                        | 185 (153 to 204)    | 145 (126 to 156) |          | < 0.001 |
| High-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL     | 45 (39 to 56)       | 47 (42 to 57) |          | 0.199   |
| Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL      | 115 (91 to 127)     | 69 (57 to 82) |          | < 0.001 |
| Triglycerides, mg/dL                            | 116 (76 to 163)     | 108 (66 to 152) |          | 0.343   |
| HbA1c, %                                        | 5.7 (5.3 to 6.4)    | 5.8 (5.5 to 6.3) |          | 0.819   |

Data are mean ± SD, or median (25-75%).

Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis for Elevation of Mini Mental State Examination Scores among Baseline Parameters.

| Parameter                                      | All patients (n=43) | Univariate (OR (95% CI) | p value | Multivariate (Hosmer–Lemeshow test; p=0.204) (OR (95% CI) | p value |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Age, years                                     |                     | 1.04 (0.96 to 1.13)     | 0.311   |                                                          |         |
| ≥65 years old, yes                             |                     | 1.98 (0.48 to 8.13)     | 0.342   | 1.54 (0.32 to 7.49) | 0.593   |
| Sex, male                                      |                     | 1.77 (0.36 to 8.55)     | 0.480   | 2.20 (0.32 to 15.0) | 0.422   |
| Systolic blood pressure, mmHg                  |                     | 1.01 (0.96 to 1.05)     | 0.769   |                                                          |         |
| Diastolic blood pressure, mmHg                 |                     | 0.99 (0.93 to 1.07)     | 0.873   |                                                          |         |
| Body mass index, kg/m²                         |                     | 0.99 (0.84 to 1.17)     | 0.897   |                                                          |         |
| Decrease in body mass index, yes               |                     | 3.74 (1.01 to 13.9)     | 0.049   | 4.57 (1.05 to 20.0) | 0.043   |
| Abdominal circumference, cm                    |                     | 0.98 (0.91 to 1.06)     | 0.602   |                                                          |         |
| Decrease in Abdominal circumference, yes       |                     | 1.63 (0.48 to 5.47)     | 0.433   |                                                          |         |
| Anaerobic threshold, mL/min/kg                 |                     | 1.01 (0.75 to 1.37)     | 0.935   |                                                          |         |
| Peak oxygen uptake, mL/min/kg                  |                     | 0.98 (0.84 to 1.15)     | 0.789   |                                                          |         |
| Maximum work load, max Watts                   |                     | 1.00 (0.98 to 1.02)     | 0.896   |                                                          |         |
| Left ventricular ejection fraction, %          |                     | 1.00 (0.95 to 1.06)     | 0.944   |                                                          |         |
| Hemoglobin, g/dL                               | 0.92 (0.65 to 1.32)  | 0.668                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Albumin, g/dL                                  | 1.05 (0.19 to 5.63)  | 0.959                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Estimated glomerular filtration rate, mL/min/1.73 m² | 1.03 (0.97 to 1.08) | 0.359                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Total cholesterol, mg/dL                       | 0.99 (0.98 to 1.01)  | 0.262                   |         |                                                          |         |
| High-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL    | 1.00 (0.95 to 1.05)  | 0.913                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL     | 0.99 (0.98 to 1.01)  | 0.459                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Triglycerides, mg/dL                           | 1.00 (0.99 to 1.00)  | 0.246                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Fasting blood glucose, mg/dL                   | 0.99 (0.96 to 1.01)  | 0.280                   |         |                                                          |         |
| HbA1c, %                                       | 0.79 (0.40 to 1.57)  | 0.505                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Mini Mental State Examination score            | 0.75 (0.55 to 1.03)  | 0.076                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Risk factors                                   |                      |                         |         |                                                          |         |
| Hypertension, yes                              | 1.20 (0.30 to 4.74)  | 0.795                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Diabetes mellitus, yes                         | 0.24 (0.06 to 0.93)  | 0.039                   | 0.25 (0.06 to 1.15) | 0.075   |
| Dyslipidemia, yes                              | 0.71 (0.16 to 3.12)  | 0.651                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Chronic kidney disease, yes                    | 0.51 (0.15 to 1.73)  | 0.282                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Cerebral stroke, yes                           | 0.50 (0.04 to 5.97)  | 0.584                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Current smoking, yes                           | 0.23 (0.02 to 2.20)  | 0.200                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Medical therapies                              |                      |                         |         |                                                          |         |
| Aspirin, yes                                   | 0.00 (0.00 to 1.00)  | 1.000                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Anticoagulant, yes                             | 5.00 (0.90 to 27.7)  | 0.066                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Angiotensin II receptor blocker, yes           | 0.86 (0.23 to 3.16)  | 0.817                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor, yes   | 0.92 (0.28 to 3.04)  | 0.887                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Diuretic, yes                                  | 1.70 (0.44 to 6.55)  | 0.440                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Calcium channel blockers, yes                  | 0.75 (0.23 to 2.50)  | 0.639                   |         |                                                          |         |
| β-blockers, yes                                | 0.52 (0.15 to 1.76)  | 0.283                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Nitrate, yes                                   | 1.41 (0.32 to 6.69)  | 0.651                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Oral hypoglycemic agent, yes                   | 1.06 (0.19 to 5.93)  | 0.951                   |         |                                                          |         |
| Insulin, yes                                   | 1.05 (0.13 to 8.24)  | 0.961                   |         |                                                          |         |
ment, while there was no marked MMSE change in the BMI-increased group (ΔBMI ≥ 0.0) (Figure E). On examining other patient characteristics (shown in Table 7), while the abdominal circumference in the BMI-increased group did not change markedly, that of the BMI-decreased group decreased significantly (Table 7). However, univariate logistic regression and linear regression analyses showed that the abdominal circumference was not associated with the MMSE score improvement (Table 3, 4). Additionally, while the average baseline renal function and left ventricular ejection fraction in the BMI-increased patients were significantly lower than in the BMI-decreased patients, a univariate logistic regression analysis showed no association between these variables and the MMSE score (Table 3). Finally, an analysis showed that both a decrease in the BMI, and the absence of baseline DM were significantly correlated with an elevation in the MMSE score in response to statin-exercise therapy (BMI, odds ratio: 3.74, p < 0.05; DM, 0.24, p < 0.05, Table 3). In multivariate logistic regression analysis adjusted for age > 65 years of age, sex, and the presence of DM, a decrease in the BMI with statin-exercise therapy remained significantly correlated with an elevation in the MMSE score (odds ratio: 4.57, p < 0.05, Table 3).

**Discussion**

The major finding of the present pilot study is that a combination of statins and regular exercise therapy appeared to significantly ameliorate cognitive dysfunction in patients already displaying mild cognitive dysfunction. This beneficial effect correlated with treatment-associated decrease in the BMI in CAD patients with mild cognitive decline as well as in those with pre-existing statin therapy.

Statins are an established therapy for reducing the risk of cardiovascular events. We previously reported the beneficial effects of statin-exercise treatment on CAD (9-11). Recently, perhaps because dietary control in statin users has been less emphasized as a therapeutic approach, high calorie and fat intake has been observed in many statin users, accompanied by higher BMI (vs. non-statin users) (12). High-calorie diets (and to a lesser extent fat intake) have a well-established role in the development of obesity and diabetes, which in turn are risk factors associated with the pathogenesis of cognitive decline (13). The potential adverse effects of statins on the cognitive function are a concerning issue. Notably, some of the beneficial effects of exercise on the MMSE in our cohort were absent in the cohort that started taking a statin de novo.

Exercise is known to exert beneficial effects on cognition (14, 15); indeed, a very recent meta-analysis showed that aerobic exercise had a significant protective effect on cognitive dysfunction in older adults with mild cognitive impairment (16). However, weight loss per se is often seen in the course of dementia, particularly in Alzheimer’s dis-

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**Table 4. Correlations between Changes in the Mini Mental State Examination Score and Each Parameter.**

| All patients (n=43) | r   | p value |
|---------------------|-----|---------|
| Change in systolic blood pressure, mmHg | -0.165 | 0.290 |
| Change in diastolic blood pressure, mmHg | -0.269 | 0.082 |
| Change in body mass index, kg/m² | -0.348 | 0.022 |
| Change in abdominal circumference, cm | -0.046 | 0.770 |
| Change in anaerobic threshold, mL/min/kg | -0.144 | 0.357 |
| Change in peak oxygen uptake, mL/min/kg | -0.088 | 0.573 |
| Change in maximum work load, max Watts | -0.050 | 0.748 |
| Change in left ventricular ejection fraction, % | 0.053 | 0.738 |
| Change in hemoglobin, g/dL | -0.198 | 0.203 |
| Change in albumin, g/dL | -0.233 | 0.133 |
| Change in estimated glomerular filtration rate, mL/min/1.73 m² | -0.012 | 0.939 |
| Change in total cholesterol, mg/dL | -0.010 | 0.951 |
| Change in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL | 0.131 | 0.404 |
| Change in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL | -0.111 | 0.479 |
| Change in triglycerides, mg/dL | 0.166 | 0.288 |
| Change in HbA1c, % | 0.220 | 0.179 |

**Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis of Changes in the Mini Mental State Examination.**

| Variable | Regression coefficient (β) | 95% CI | p value |
|----------|--------------------------|-------|---------|
| Age, years | 0.014 | -0.111 to 0.12 | 0.926 |
| Sex, male | 0.079 | -1.53 to 2.60 | 0.601 |
| Hypertension, yes | 0.247 | -0.36 to 3.35 | 0.111 |
| Diabetes mellitus, yes | -0.254 | -3.09 to 0.29 | 0.101 |
| Cerebral stroke, yes | 0.100 | -2.14 to 4.21 | 0.513 |
| Changes in body mass index, kg/m² | -0.347 | -1.51 to -0.08 | 0.030 |

r² = 0.274.
Table 6. Effects of Statin-exercise Treatment on Various Parameters in the Mini Mental State Examination Score-decreased and -increased Groups.

| Parameter                                      | Mini Mental State Examination Score -decreased Group (n = 22) | Mini Mental State Examination Score -increased Group (n = 21) |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                  | Baseline 5 months                                           | Baseline 5 months                                          |
| Systolic blood pressure, mmHg                    | 119 ± 15                                                    | 123 ± 15                                                   |
| Change in systolic blood pressure                | + 4 ± 19                                                    | + 2 ± 16                                                   |
| Diastolic blood pressure, mmHg                   | 69 ± 10                                                     | 73 ± 10                                                    |
| Change in diastolic blood pressure               | + 3 ± 13                                                    | + 1 ± 11                                                   |
| Body mass index, kg/m²                            | 24.3 ± 3.4                                                 | 24.7 ± 3.3                                                 |
| Change in body mass index                         | + 0.4 ± 1.1                                                 | - 0.4 ± 1.1                                                |
| Abdominal circumference, cm                       | 88.8 (83.5 to 94.9)                                         | 86.3 (81.8 to 92.9)                                        |
| Change in abdominal circumference                | - 1.5 ± 5.6                                                 | + 1.4 ± 4.1                                                |
| Anaerobic threshold, mL/min/kg                    | 10.3 ± 1.9                                                  | 10.7 ± 2.0                                                 |
| Change in anaerobic threshold                     | + 0.4 ± 1.8                                                 | + 0.4 ± 2.4                                                |
| Peak oxygen uptake, mL/min/kg                     | 15.9 ± 3.6                                                  | 16.4 ± 3.0                                                 |
| Change in peak oxygen uptake                      | + 0.6 ± 2.3                                                 | + 0.8 ± 2.6                                                |
| Maximum work load, max Watts                      | 77.0 ± 23.9                                                 | 81.0 ± 23.8 *                                             |
| Change in maximum work load                       | + 4 ± 7                                                     | + 3 ± 17                                                   |
| Left ventricular ejection fraction, %             | 59.0 ± 11.8                                                 | 61.8 ± 8.2                                                 |
| Change in left ventricular ejection fraction      | + 2.8 ± 10.8                                                | + 2.7 ± 9.7                                                |
| Hemoglobin, g/dL                                  | 13.8 ± 2.0                                                  | 13.9 ± 1.8                                                 |
| Change in hemoglobin                              | + 0.1 ± 1.3                                                 | + 0.0 ± 1.5                                                |
| Albumin, g/dL                                     | 3.9 (3.6 to 4.1)                                            | 4.3 (4.0 to 4.6) †                                         |
| Change in albumin                                 | + 0.4 ± 0.5                                                 | + 0.3 ± 0.4                                                |
| Estimated glomerular filtration rate, mL/min/1.73 m² | 58.8 (46.4 to 64.1)                                         | 58.2 (48.3 to 66.7)                                        |
| Change in estimated glomerular filtration rate   | - 0.2 ± 7.0                                                 | - 0.1 ± 8.9                                                |
| Total cholesterol, mg/dL                          | 187 (168 to 203)                                            | 148 (134 to 156) †                                         |
| Change in total cholesterol                       | - 48 ± 45                                                   | - 43 ± 44                                                  |
| High-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL       | 45 (40 to 57)                                               | 46 (41 to 54)                                              |
| Change in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol    | - 0.5 ± 11.5                                                | 46 (38 to 55)                                              |
| Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL        | 116 (93 to 128)                                             | 76 (67 to 84) †                                            |
| Change in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol     | - 45 ± 38                                                   | 115 (77 to 128)                                            |
| Triglycerides, mg/dL                              | 133 (87 to 176)                                             | 113 (84 to 152)                                            |
| Change in triglycerides                           | - 24 ± 77                                                   | 92 (62 to 134)                                             |
| Mini Mental State Examination score               | 24 (23 to 25)                                               | 23 (22 to 25)                                              |
| Change in Mini Mental State Examination score     | - 0.8 ± 1.7                                                 | 27 (25 to 28) †                                            |
|                                                                                           | + 3.5 ± 1.4 †                                               |

Data are mean ± SD, or median (25% to 75%). Mini Mental State Examination Score-decreased (MMSE ≤1.0) and -increased (MMSE >1.0) Groups *p < 0.05, †p < 0.01 compared with the respective baseline values; ‡p < 0.05 compared with the Mini Mental State Examination Score-decreased Group.

ease (17). In fact, low BMI as well as weight-loss were the predominant risk factors for mild cognitive impairment-to-dementia conversion in aged subjects with cognitive decline (18). This likely relates to a diminished appetite and not increased physical activity. To prevent further progression of dementia in CAD patients with cognitive decline, we suspect that body weight management through exercise during statin therapy may be crucial in order for patients to experience maximal benefit.

The findings of this study could lead to novel and practical therapeutic approaches to prevent development and/or limit progression of cognitive decline in CAD patients. However, to confirm the importance of combined statin-exercise therapy, further large prospective clinical studies are required; for example, comparing the cognitive outcomes among independent groups receiving exercise or statin, a statin-exercise combination group, and a non-exercise (control) group. Standardization of statin dosing and type are also crucial, as the present pilot study suggests that the effects of the combination of certain statin therapy types with exercise in CAD patients should be evaluated. The MMSE score in lipophilic statins users increased significantly over the study period, while hydrophilic statin users saw no marked change. Hydrophilic statins are less permeable across the blood-brain barrier than lipophilic statins in model systems (19), raising the question of what impact the hydrophilicity of a given statin might have on brain disorders and/or healthy brain. Interestingly, Rojas-Fernandez et al. concluded in a systemic review that hydrophilic statins (pravastatin and rosuvastatin) might be less likely to contribute to cognitive impairment, due to their limited penetration across the blood-brain barrier (20). These elements should be assessed in combination with exercise in future investigations of the cognitive function.

Our study has several limitations. First, our study design prevented effective confirmation of which element of the in-
Table 7. Effects of Statin-exercise Treatment on Various Parameters in the Body Mass Index-decreased and -increased Groups.

| Parameter                                           | Body Mass Index-decreased Group (n=16) | Body Mass Index-increased Group (n=27) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                                                     | Baseline                              | 5 months                              | Baseline                              | 5 months                              |
| Systolic blood pressure, mmHg                       | 120 ± 14                              | 123 ± 16                              | 119 ± 14                              | 122 ± 15                              |
| Change in systolic blood pressure                   | + 2 ± 14                              | + 3 ± 20                              |                                       |                                       |
| Diastolic blood pressure, mmHg                       | 68 ± 8                                | 68 ± 8                                | 70 ± 9                                | 72 ± 10                               |
| Change in diastolic blood pressure                  | - 1 ± 10                              |                                       | + 3 ± 13                              |                                       |
| Body mass index, kg/m²                               | 25.0 ± 4.4                            | 23.8 ± 4.1                            | 23.8 ± 3.1                            | 24.5 ± 3.1                            |
| Change in body mass index                           | - 1.2 ± 0.9                           |                                       | + 0.7 ± 0.6                           |                                       |
| Abdominal circumference, cm                         | 89.0 (84.1 to 94.6)                   | 85.3 (79.4 to 92.4)                   | 87.0 (83.5 to 94.0)                   | 87.0 (84.0 to 94.0)                   |
| Change in abdominal circumference                   | - 3.5 ± 5.4                           |                                       | - 0.4 ± 3.9                           |                                       |
| Anaerobic threshold, mL/min/kg                      | 10.9 ± 2.0                            | 11.0 ± 2.0                            | 10.0 ± 2.0                            | 10.5 ± 1.9                            |
| Change in anaerobic threshold                       | + 0.2 ± 2.7                           |                                       | + 0.5 ± 1.6                           |                                       |
| Peak oxygen uptake, mL/min/kg                       | 16.4 ± 3.8                            | 17.0 ± 2.3                            | 15.3 ± 3.9                            | 16.0 ± 3.4                            |
| Change in peak oxygen uptake                        | + 0.6 ± 2.9                           |                                       | + 0.8 ± 2.1                           |                                       |
| Maximum work load, max Watts                        | 79.4 ± 27.2                           | 79.3 ± 18.2                           | 74.7 ± 26.5                           | 80.5 ± 26.0                           |
| Change in maximum work load                         | 0 ± 17                                |                                       | + 6 ± 9                               |                                       |
| Left ventricular ejection fraction, %               | 63.7 ± 11.2                           | 63.2 ± 6.7                            | 56.4 ± 11.4                           | 61.0 ± 8.4                            |
| Change in left ventricular ejection fraction         | - 0.5 ± 9.7                           |                                       | + 4.6 ± 10.1                          |                                       |
| Hemoglobin, g/dL                                    | 13.7 ± 1.6                            | 13.6 ± 1.3                            | 13.6 ± 1.8                            | 13.8 ± 1.6                            |
| Change in hemoglobin                                | - 0.8 ± 1.2                           |                                       | + 0.2 ± 1.4                           |                                       |
| Albumin, g/dL                                       | 3.8 (3.6 to 4.1)                      | 4.2 (4.0 to 4.5)                      | 3.9 (3.5 to 4.1)                      | 4.3 (4.0 to 4.6)                      |
| Change in albumin                                   | + 0.3 ± 0.4                           |                                       | + 0.4 ± 0.5                           |                                       |
| Estimated glomerular filtration rate, mL/min/1.73 m² | 59.8 (58.9 to 70.6)                   | 65.1 (55.1 to 73.8)                   | 56.8 (45.8 to 66.0)                   | 55.1 (40.0 to 65.8)                   |
| Change in estimated glomerular filtration rate      | + 2.0 ± 8.1                           |                                       | - 1.5 ± 7.6                           |                                       |
| Total cholesterol, mg/dL                            | 188 (166 to 234)                      | 143 (116 to 155)                      | 180 (152 to 199)                      | 151 (131 to 157)                      |
| Change in total cholesterol                         | - 61 ± 50                             |                                       | - 37 ± 39                             |                                       |
| High-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL         | 49 (38 to 60)                         | 48 (43 to 60)                         | 44 (39 to 53)                         | 47 (41 to 53)                         |
| Change in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol      | + 0.3 ± 1.2                           |                                       | + 1.7 ± 1.0                           |                                       |
| Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, mg/dL          | 116 (96 to 140)                       | 64 (56 to 81)                         | 114 (87 to 127)                       | 73 (61 to 82)                         |
| Change in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol       | - 56 ± 46                             |                                       | - 39 ± 26                             |                                       |
| Triglycerides, mg/dL                                | 98 (67 to 142)                        | 68 (52 to 124)                        | 126 (81 to 169)                       | 121 (88 to 172)                       |
| Change in triglycerides                             | - 35 ± 79                             |                                       | - 2 ± 94                              |                                       |
| Mini Mental State Examination score                 | 24 (22 to 25)                         | 26 (23 to 28)                         | 24 (22 to 25)                         | 25 (22 to 27)                         |
| Change in Mini Mental State Examination score       | + 2.3 ± 2.6                           |                                       | + 0.7 ± 2.6                           |                                       |

Data are mean ± SD, or median (25% to 75%). Body Mass Index-decreased (ΔBMI <0.0) and -increased (ΔBMI ≥0.0) Groups

*p < 0.05, †p < 0.01 compared with the respective baseline values; ‡p < 0.05 compared with the Body Mass Index -decreased Group.

Intervention improved cognitive function in these CAD patients, although subgroup analyses suggested that exercise might be more crucial. Second, the study included only a small number of patients from a single center.

In conclusion, the combination of statins and exercise appears to be associated with significant improvement in the cognition of CAD patients with mild pre-existing cognitive dysfunction. A decrease in the BMI during therapy was an independent factor associated with improved cognition.

Author’s disclosure of potential Conflicts of Interest (COI).

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