

High cholesterol in those with a low cardiovascular risk

Thank you for attending for your blood tests. It shows that your cholesterol levels are above the recommended level of 5mmol/l.

High cholesterol is just one factor that can increase your risk of “cardiovascular disease” (which includes conditions such as heart attacks, strokes, kidney problems and reduced blood supply to the legs). Other risk factors for cardiovascular disease include diabetes, high blood pressure, a poor diet, being overweight, smoking and lack of exercise.

Having only one risk factor (like high cholesterol) doesn't necessarily mean you will develop cardiovascular disease. If you have lots of risk factors it means you are much more likely to develop cardiovascular disease. The doctor or nurse can calculate your risk of cardiovascular disease from what we know about your risk factors.

We have calculated your risk and although your cholesterol is high, your overall risk of cardiovascular disease is low. Presently, we do not recommend starting you on medication to help you lower your cholesterol. However, some simple changes to your lifestyle will reduce your cholesterol and keep you healthy.

Factors that can help reduce your cholesterol and your risk of cardiovascular disease are: not smoking, choosing healthy foods, a low salt intake, regular physical activity, keeping your weight and waist size down and not drinking too much alcohol.

Regular exercise is recommended for at least 30 minutes five times a week and should be intense enough for you to work up a sweat and get you out of breath, such as a brisk walk, jog, cycle or swim or an exercise DVD. But any exercise is better than none and we would encourage you to do whatever you can!

Changing from an unhealthy diet to a healthy diet can help reduce a cholesterol level. Briefly, a healthy diet means:

- AT LEAST five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables per day.
- THE BULK OF MOST MEALS should be starch-based foods (such as cereals, wholegrain bread, potatoes, rice, pasta), plus fruit and vegetables.
- NOT MUCH fatty food such as fatty meats, cheeses, full-cream milk, fried food, butter, etc. Use low- fat, mono-unsaturated or polyunsaturated spreads. Avoid eating take-away food regularly.
- INCLUDE 2-3 portions of fish per week - at least one of which should be oily (but if you are pregnant you should not have more than two portions of oily fish a week).
- LIMIT SALT to no more than 6 g a day (and less for children).
- If you eat meat, it is best to EAT LEAN MEAT, or poultry such as chicken.
- If you do fry, choose a VEGETABLE OIL, such as sunflower, rapeseed or olive.

We recommend you have an annual cholesterol check from now.

Lots more information is available on the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk