

Cholesterol: Know Your Numbers

A simple guide to understanding what your cholesterol results actually mean

Cholesterol can feel confusing - lots of letters, lots of numbers, not much explanation. This guide breaks it down simply, so you can look at your own results and understand what you're looking at. You don't need to be an expert. You just need to know enough to ask good questions and take one small next step.

Why bother checking?

- High cholesterol usually has no symptoms at all – a blood test is the only way to know your numbers
- It matters because, over many years, it can affect your heart and blood vessels
- Knowing your numbers puts you back in the driving seat of your own health

Your cholesterol results, simply

Result	What it is	A generally healthy level
Total cholesterol	All the cholesterol in your blood, added together	5.0 mmol/L or below
LDL	Often called 'bad' cholesterol – too much can build up in your blood vessels over time	3.0 mmol/L or below
HDL	Often called 'good' cholesterol – it helps carry cholesterol away	1.0+ mmol/L (men), 1.2+ mmol/L (women)
Non-HDL	Everything that isn't 'good' cholesterol, added together – a useful overall marker	4.0 mmol/L or below
Triglycerides	Another type of fat in your blood. High levels can increase heart and circulatory disease and are often linked with insulin resistance, excess weight around the middle, added sugars/refined carbohydrates, alcohol and low activity levels.	1.7 mmol/L or below (fasting) 2.0 mmol/L or below (non-fasting)

These are general guides for healthy adults, not a personal target. Your own healthy number depends on your health history, so always ask your GP or nurse what's right for you.

They also reflect current UK guidance. If you live elsewhere, your local targets may look slightly different – but the everyday lifestyle habits that support healthy cholesterol are the same wherever you are.

Looking at your NHS App?

You may see the word "serum" before your results, for example serum cholesterol, serum HDL cholesterol or serum triglycerides. "Serum" is simply the laboratory term for the part of your blood being measured - it does not mean a different type of cholesterol. You may also see a total cholesterol:HDL ratio. This is used as part of calculating cardiovascular risk (QRISK), rather than having a standalone healthy target.

What if my numbers are high?

A high result is not necessarily a diagnosis, and it's not a reflection of anything you've done wrong. Many things affect cholesterol – genetics, hormones (including menopause), medical conditions, and yes, some lifestyle factors too. **It's simply really useful information.**

Your next step

1

FIND YOUR RESULT

Look in your NHS App, or ask your GP practice for your latest cholesterol results.

2

ASK ONE QUESTION

'What does this mean for me?' is a great place to start. Once you understand your numbers, you can see what you're aiming for and keep track of your progress.

3

WATCH THIS SPACE

Watch my [cholesterol series](#) for simple, practical skills to help look after the network of blood vessels that keep you well – they are well worth protecting as they carry everything your brain and body need to function at their best.

You don't need to understand everything today. Knowing your numbers is already a great first step.

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EVIDENCE BASE *NICE lipid modification and cardiovascular risk guidance | NHS clinical guidance*