

Cholesterol testing

A lot of patients ask about whether they need this

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in the blood that can clog up the vessels and lead to heart attacks and strokes and other things. It is possible to reduce cholesterol levels a little by eating a healthy diet (low in fat, high in fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals and fish) and taking regular exercise. The important thing to note is that even if your cholesterol is not reduced, doing these things will help you live longer and better. Cholesterol reducing drugs (statins) are prescribed to people at high risk of developing cholesterol related diseases.

We only give drugs if you have a very high level or if you have coronary heart disease or diabetes. (There are also a few other instances where they might be given).

Everybody wants to reduce their chances of having a heart attack or stroke, but measuring your cholesterol alone is not going to reduce your chances. If you want to reduce your risk of these diseases the following thing should be done. The most important ones first.

1. Do not smoke
2. Take regular exercise that makes you breathless for 20 minutes at least 3 times a week
3. Be a healthy weight
4. Get your blood pressure normal (we will check it every 2 years, that is enough)
5. Check you are not diabetic (we will do urine test every 2 years if you are over 50)

When you have put all these things right you will have reduced your risks as much as you reasonably can. If you then still want a cholesterol test we will do one for you. We can then work out if you are at higher than average risk for heart disease, stroke etc., based on your cholesterol result **together with** other factors such as blood pressure, family history, and smoking history.

Category A

If your risk is higher, and, having discussed the benefits with your doctor, you are eligible under NHS guidelines *and* wish to take advantage of cholesterol lowering treatment, we will provide this.

Known as PRIMARY PREVENTION therapy, this is lifelong, or as long as you wish to continue. This DOES NOT require further regular measurement of your cholesterol whilst you are taking the medication, unless you subsequently enter category B, below.

Category B

Certain medical conditions unfortunately do carry extra risk; these include coronary heart disease, stroke disease, diabetes, some kidney and circulatory conditions.

It is known, however, that reducing cholesterol in such patients DOES confer significant benefits in terms of quality of life and prevention of complications, and can lengthen life expectancy.

This is known as SECONDARY PREVENTION

To obtain these benefits, there are target values for your cholesterol which vary depending on the medical condition concerned, and so YEARLY monitoring DOES become necessary, and will be arranged through our various clinics or by your doctor.

If medication is recommended for either category A or B above, your doctor or nurse will be happy to explain this further, and answer any questions you may have.

Cholesterol reducing statin medication is now available over the counter from pharmacists, Although the dose available is not as large as the dose doctors normally prescribe, it is probably effective at reducing the likelihood of a heart attack or stroke in anybody who takes it. This will be of most interest to patients who know

they are at risk but not sufficiently at risk for us to be able to prescribe it on the NHS. (We are obliged to follow Department of Health guidelines on this).

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