Cholesterol explained

What do HDL, LDL, non-HDL and the ratio mean?

The names

Total cholesterol is the overall amount. Raised LDL can contribute to artery deposits. HDL helps carry cholesterol towards the liver. Triglycerides are another blood fat.

Non-HDL

Total cholesterol minus HDL. It includes LDL and other cholesterol-carrying particles.

The ratio

TC:HDL is total cholesterol divided by HDL. Use matching cholesterol units; the ratio itself has no unit.

Made-up results

Total 4.8 mmol/L and HDL 1.2 mmol/L give non-HDL 3.6 mmol/L and a ratio of 4, often written 4:1. These numbers explain the sum; they are not targets.

The whole picture

A reassuring ratio does not cancel a raised LDL or non-HDL. What applies to you depends on the full report, your history and overall risk.

Ask at the appointment

Which target matters for me? What changes should I make? When should the test be repeated? Take medicines as directed and discuss concerns before changing them.

Sources and full guidance

NHS: Cholesterol levels
HEART UK: Understanding cholesterol test results

A summary of the web guide, not a complete assessment of your needs. Full guide | Scope and personal advice.