

High C-reactive Protein—What Does that Mean?

What is C-reactive protein?

- C-reactive protein (CRP) is a marker of inflammation.
- CRP is made in the liver and is not usually found in the blood.

What does it mean if my CRP is high?

- You have had a blood test where your level of CRP was measured.
- Research has been inconclusive as to the exact cause of elevated CRP levels.
- Some doctors believe that it means that you have a metabolic disorder like high cholesterol, high blood sugar, high body fat or other signs of metabolic syndrome.
- Some believe that CRP may predict cardiovascular disease, even if a person's LDL (or bad) cholesterol is in the normal range.

What is high?

- There is no consistent interpretation about what is “high”.
- Some researchers consider a CRP greater than 0.30 mg/dL to be high.
- Some labs say that normal is between 0.0 and 0.8 mg/dL.
- Other labs say that there is no risk unless the CRP is greater than 1.5 mg/dL.

What does it mean for me?

- The Women's Health Study reported that a woman's risk for a heart attack starts to go up once the CRP is greater than 0.49 mg/dL. The risk gets bigger the higher the CRP.
- The internal inflammation, which CRP marks, is thought to contribute to loosening plaque (material that clogs the artery walls) and forming blood clots. Because of these findings, some health organizations now advocate that the CRP be measured if a person has more than two of the traditional risk factors for heart disease.

- Some doctors believe that the CRP does not really add any new information. They say it will not change their recommendations to their patients.
- Other doctors think that a patient might be motivated by knowing the CRP is high and may be more willing to change lifestyle or take a medicine known to lower CRP.

What do I do about it?

- **Try to quit smoking.**

If you smoke, are you willing to quit? We know that smokers have higher CRP levels. It is not clear how quickly the levels will drop when you quit. Nonetheless, there are great health reasons not to smoke.

- **Try to lose weight.**

If you are overweight, are you willing to lose weight? Overweight adults and children have higher CRP than those at a normal weight. Small amounts of weight loss do bring CRP down, along with lowering blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, triglycerides and other risk factors.

- **Be physically active.**

Are you willing to be more physically active? People who are sedentary have higher CRP levels. There was a small study that showed as individuals did some physical activity training their CRP dropped.

- **Consider taking medicine.**

Are you willing and able to take medicine? A few small studies have shown that being on a statin medicine, taking aspirin, or taking ibuprofen may lower CRP. Of course there are potential side effects with taking any medicine. Discuss this with your doctor.

There are some other things that might lower CRP. You may want to try some of these, with the consent of your doctor, to see if they make a difference for you.

- **Eat oily fish or take fish oil tablets.**

There is a potential danger of fish oils interacting badly with other medicines. So, if you are on medications that thin the blood, be sure to ask your doctor before you start fish oils.

- **Eat more whole foods like fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, and cereals.**

People who eat a lot of refined carbohydrates and processed foods seem to have a high CRP. But there is no study that shows people who eat a high glycemic load diet and had a high CRP lowered their CRP by eating a low glycemic load diet. Eating more whole foods like fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals would lower risks for heart disease more than drinking lots of sodas, sweet tea, eating French fries, and other sweets. Neither green nor black tea lowers CRP.