

A photograph of an elderly woman with short, curly, light-colored hair, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat and a dark blue polo shirt. She is smiling and holding a bunch of small, pink and white radishes in her hands. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor garden setting.

# Women 60 and over

Cholesterol, thyroid, B12 and kidneys: the numbers that change with age.

# Blood tests for women from 60

After 60, a slow thyroid, low B12 and kidney changes become more common, often without symptoms. A blood test shows your numbers for you and your GP.

## It can

- ✓ Show how your thyroid is working, with TSH and T4
- ✓ Show your B12, which some common medicines lower
- ✓ Show your cholesterol, blood sugar and kidneys, which give no early symptoms

## It cannot

- ✗ Show your bone density or risk of falls: bone is measured with a DEXA scan
- ✗ Clear you to train or assess your heart: it shows risk factors
- ✗ Change your medicines because of B12: that is with your GP

## WHY IT MATTERS

01

### **The NHS Health Check runs to 74, and cholesterol tends to be higher after the menopause**

Every 5 years the NHS offers a cholesterol test, and possibly a blood sugar test. Cholesterol rises around the last period and gives no symptoms. <sup>[1, 2, 3]</sup>

02

### **A slow thyroid becomes more common with age, especially in women**

In a 20 year UK study, the risk rose with age, and women had 3.5 new cases per 1,000 a year, against 0.6 in men. A TSH and T4 blood test is how it is measured. <sup>[4, 5]</sup>

03

### **Low B12 becomes more common after 65**

In 3,511 people in the UK aged 65 or over, it went from about 1 in 20 at 65 to 74 to 1 in 10 or more from 75. Some common medicines, such as metformin and acid reflux tablets, lower it. <sup>[6, 7]</sup>

## WHY IT MATTERS

04

### **Early kidney disease gives no warning, and is linked to age**

There are usually no symptoms in the early stages. Creatinine and eGFR come in the same sample.  
[8]

05

### **Staying active does not cancel out heart risk**

The NHS suggests at least 150 minutes of moderate activity a week from 65, with strength, balance and flexibility on at least 2 days. For athletes over 35, the European sports cardiology guideline focuses on the heart arteries and uses cholesterol in its risk score. Being cleared to train is a clinical assessment.<sup>[9, 10]</sup>

# What usually makes sense, and when to repeat it

| TEST                                      | WHY                                                                                                                                            | WHEN TO REPEAT                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cholesterol profile</b>                | Cholesterol tends to be higher after the menopause, and it gives no symptoms. <sup>[1, 2, 3]</sup>                                             | Every 5 years at the NHS Health Check up to 74, or as your GP advises.  |
| <b>HbA1c (average blood sugar)</b>        | Blood sugar can be part of the NHS Health Check. Type 2 diabetes does not always cause symptoms. <sup>[1, 11]</sup>                            | Every 5 years at the NHS Health Check, or as your GP advises.           |
| <b>TSH and free T4 (thyroid)</b>          | An underactive thyroid becomes more common with age, especially in women. <sup>[4, 5]</sup>                                                    | If you have symptoms, or as your GP advises.                            |
| <b>Vitamin B12 and folate</b>             | Low B12 becomes more common after 65, and some common medicines, such as metformin and acid reflux tablets, lower it. <sup>[6, 7]</sup>        | As your GP advises; more often on metformin or reflux tablets.          |
| <b>Kidney function (creatinine, eGFR)</b> | Early kidney disease usually has no symptoms and is linked to getting older. <sup>[8]</sup>                                                    | With your cholesterol; more often with high blood pressure or diabetes. |
| <b>Full blood count and ferritin</b>      | Shows anaemia, which can come from low iron or low B12. <sup>[6, 12]</sup>                                                                     | With your B12.                                                          |
| <b>Vitamin D, 25(OH)D</b>                 | The NHS suggests vitamin D all year for people who are not often outdoors, and women lose bone faster after the menopause. <sup>[13, 14]</sup> | In late winter, or as your GP advises.                                  |

## What to do with your result

Your result arrives in your account, with reference ranges. A value outside the range, or a symptom with a normal result, is a conversation with your GP: treatment and supplements are their call. Repeat the same test later to compare.

## SOURCES

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General information, not personal medical advice. Talk to your GP about your own situation. Questions: [hello@bpr.clinic](mailto:hello@bpr.clinic) or message us in the BPR app.

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