

BIHS Statement on NICE Guideline NG238: Cardiovascular disease: risk assessment and reduction, including lipid modification [NG238] Published: 14 December 2023. Endorsed by the BIHS Guidelines Standing Committee and Executive Committee.

In December 2023, NICE updated its guidance on lipid targets and lipid-lowering treatments for the secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease. The new recommendations include:

- Treatment targets: LDL \leq 2.0 mmol/L or non-HDL \leq 2.6 mmol/L [Section: 1.7.1].
- Offer Atorvastatin 80mg [Section 1.7.2] unless contraindicated [Section 1.7.3]. NICE noted that in December 2023 this was an off-label use of atorvastatin.
- Prescribe Ezetimibe if statins are contraindicated or not tolerated [Section 1.10.1].
- Add additional lipid-lowering treatments to achieve treatment targets, e.g. Alirocumab, Evolocumab, Ezetimibe or Inclisiran [Section 1.7.10].
- Add Ezetimibe to further reduce cardiovascular risk, even if the lipid target is achieved [Section 1.7.11].
- Do not prescribe fibrates, nicotinic acid or a bile acid sequestrant to reduce CVD risk [1.12.2/3/4].

The BIHS supports the new NICE recommendations on treating to lipid lowering targets, for the secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease, but wish to highlight two important issues:

Firstly, the NICE lipid targets (LDL \leq 2.0 or non-HDL \leq 2.6) are determined by an economic model that currently conflicts with the 2023/24 QOF targets (LDL $<$ 1.8 or non-HDL $<$ 2.5) used in General Practice in England. This may cause confusion and contribute to implementation inertia in clinical practice. The BIHS raised this issue with the NICE Guideline Development Committee and understand the disparity between targets was recognised and is expected to be addressed in due course.

Secondly, it is important that lipid levels, prior to commencing Ezetimibe, are used when making therapeutic decisions about additional lipid-lowering drugs. This ensures that patients can benefit from Ezetimibe as soon as possible, without subsequently excluding them from meeting the qualifying criteria for additional lipid-lowering medications (e.g. Inclisiran).

The BIHS recommends the following lipid-lowering management plan for the secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease:

- [1] Measure baseline lipid profile, renal and liver function.
- [2] Prescribe atorvastatin 80mg, unless contraindicated.
- [3] Check liver function and lipid profile 3 months after starting atorvastatin, again at 12 months and when clinically indicated.
- [4] Add Ezetimibe, even if the lipid target is achieved.
- [5] Add additional lipid-lowering medications (e.g. Inclisiran) if indicated by the post-atorvastatin lipid levels.