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Common Causes of an Elevated CRP

If your C-Reactive Protein (CRP) level is high, it means there is inflammation in your body. However, the cause can be wide-ranging, from a minor infection to a long-term health condition. It is a signal for your doctor to investigate further.

Here are some of the most common reasons for a high CRP level:

- **Infections:** This is the most frequent cause. Bacterial infections like pneumonia, urinary tract infections (UTIs), or skin infections (cellulitis) can cause a sharp rise in CRP. Viral infections like the flu or COVID-19 can also raise it.
- **Chronic Inflammatory Diseases:** Conditions where the body's immune system attacks its own tissues cause long-term inflammation. This includes autoimmune diseases like **Rheumatoid Arthritis** and **Lupus**.
- **Injury or Surgery:** Any significant trauma to the body, including a major surgery or a serious burn, will trigger a strong inflammatory response and a high CRP.
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Certain habits and conditions can cause low-grade, chronic inflammation. These include **obesity**, **smoking**, a sedentary lifestyle, and high levels of stress.

CRP vs. hs-CRP: What's the Difference?

You may hear your doctor mention two types of CRP tests: the standard CRP test and the high-sensitivity CRP (hs-CRP) test.

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Test Type	What It Measures	Why It's Used
Standard CRP	Detects high levels of inflammation.	Used to find or monitor significant inflammation from infections or active diseases. The range is typically >10 mg/L.
hs-CRP	Detects low levels of chronic inflammation.	Used primarily to assess the risk of future heart disease. It measures very subtle inflammation in the blood

vessels.

For assessing heart disease risk, doctors look at hs-CRP levels in a much lower range:

- Less than 1.0 mg/L:** Low risk
- 1.0 to 3.0 mg/L:** Average risk
- Greater than 3.0 mg/L:** High risk

An hs-CRP test is not useful if you have an active infection or a known inflammatory disease, as your CRP will already be very high. It is a tool for predicting future risk in otherwise healthy individuals.

When Should You Worry?

A high CRP result can be concerning, but it is not a diagnosis in itself. It is a signal, not a sentence. Your doctor will always interpret the result in the context of your symptoms, physical examination, and other lab tests.

This guide provides general information and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Always discuss your test results with your doctor to understand what they mean for you.