

Explaining a Number

Use absolute figures, natural frequencies where useful, a relevant population and time period. Check understanding. Format can change understanding; no longevity outcome benefit is claimed.

What it is: marker, unit, context and uncertainty

What it is not: no diagnosis or prediction from one number

What next: decision, review and person responsible

Richard practice prompt: hs-CRP 2.1 mg/L. Explain in three plain-language sentences. hs-CRP is non-specific and can rise during infection; interpret clinically rather than labelling it “bad”.

Source: Gigerenzer & Edwards. BMJ. 2003;327:741-744.