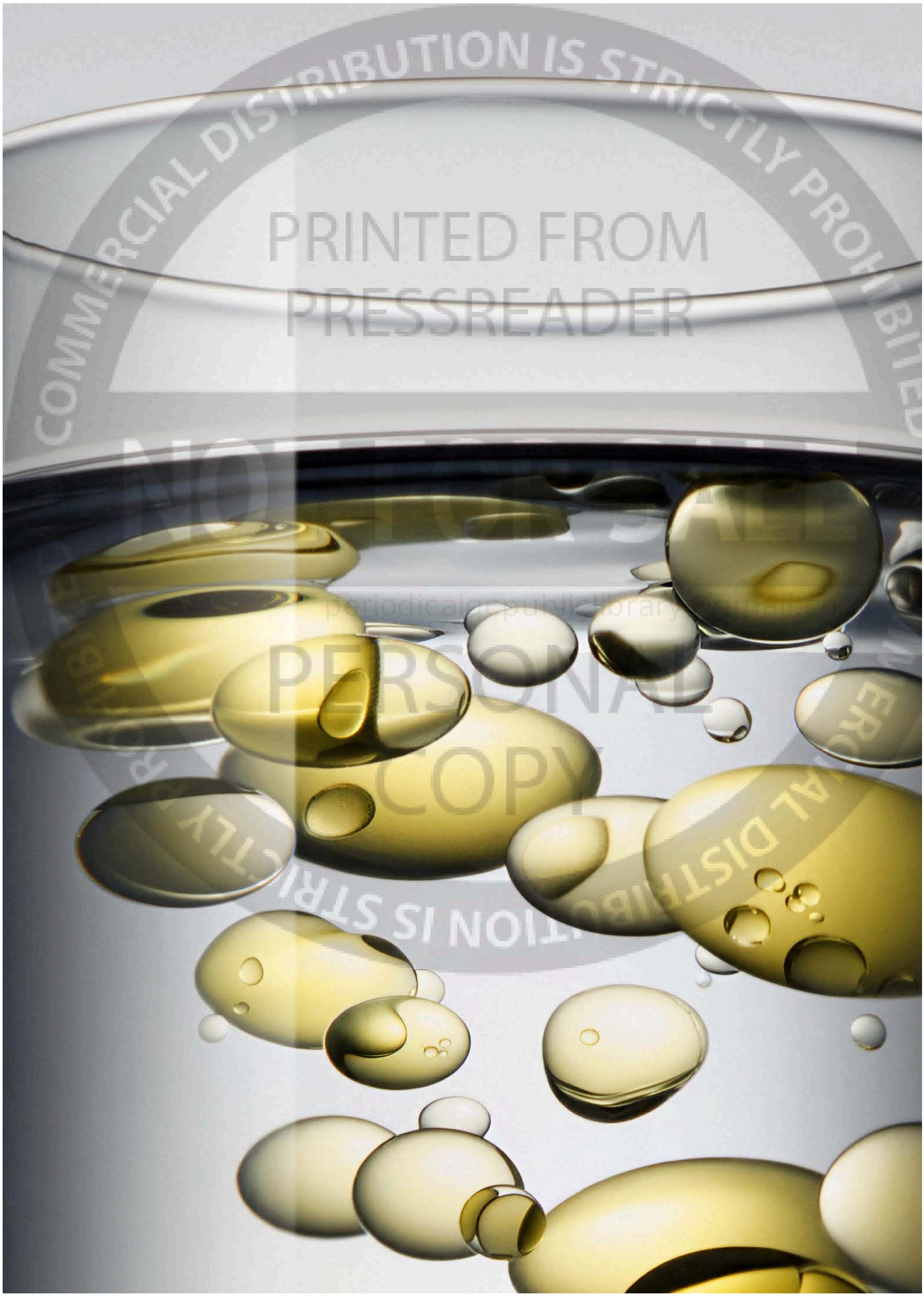
- Cholesterol



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TRUNK ARCHIVE.

Cholesterol Confusion

Social media is abuzz with bewildering (and even worrisome) theories about cholesterol and the medications used to lower it. We sort out what's truth, what's error, and what's conspiracy to help you keep your heart healthy and strong.

BY MERYL DAVIDS LANDAU

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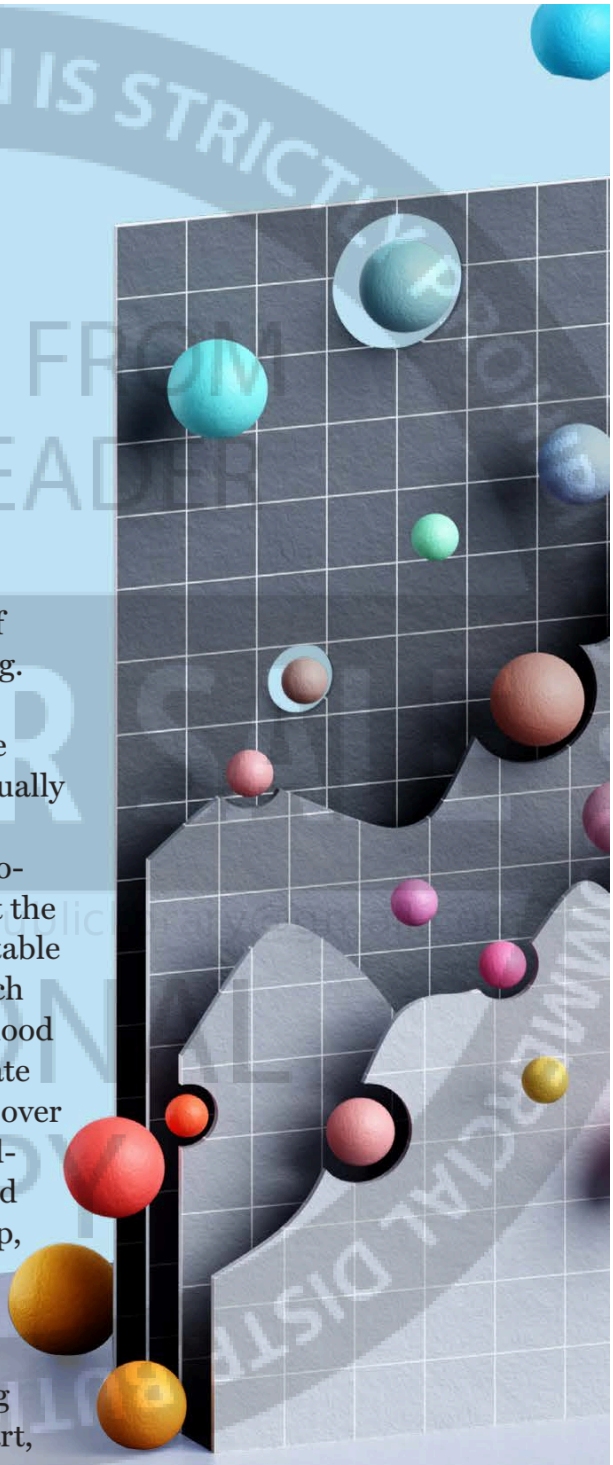

IF YOUR DOCTOR HAS REPORTED THAT YOUR CHOLESTEROL IS TOO HIGH,

join the club. About a third of American adults—some 86 million of us—have levels that are higher than ideal. The same goes for 7% of U.S. kids. And if your doctor's suggestion that you take steps to lower your cholesterol has created a tug-of-war in your head, you've got a lot of company.

Perhaps you've seen social media posts claiming that lowering cholesterol is a plot by drug companies to make more money or heard fierce debates among scientists about how low is too low. Yet you also know that high blood cholesterol sets the stage for heart disease, the number one killer of women. As with much quick-hit online health info, things get oversimplified and misinterpreted, and some of it is just plain wrong.

Some truths: Cholesterol isn't the devil—the body actually needs this waxy fat substance that it produces naturally. But the evidence is indisputable that having too much cholesterol in the blood leads it to accumulate in artery walls, and over the years these hardened deposits (called plaque) can build up, causing blockages. Plaque can also rupture and stop blood from reaching the brain or the heart, triggering a stroke or a heart attack. Lowering cholesterol reduces the chances of this. "Heart health starts with people knowing their cholesterol numbers and understanding that persistently high levels have been clearly shown to increase cardiovascular risk," says Erica Spatz, M.D., a preventive cardiologist at Yale Medicine. Read on for more about cholesterol to help you stay on the healthiest course.

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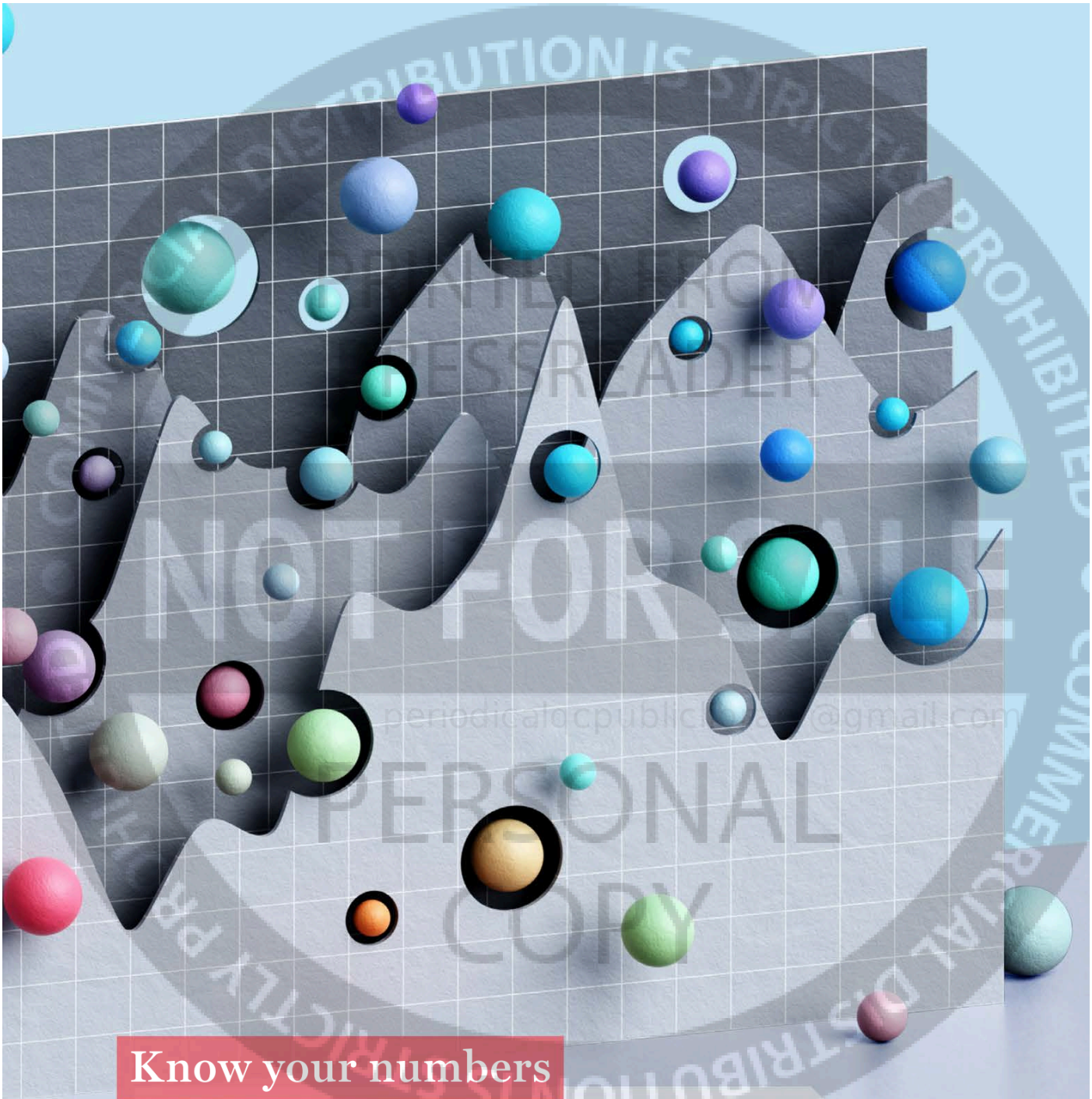

GETTY IMAGES.

Know your numbers

Cholesterol is measured via blood work done in the doctor's office or at a lab. Generally the test happens every three years—more often if your cholesterol runs high. Some women develop high cholesterol early on, but for many the numbers start to creep up around menopause, says Dr. Spatz.

THE IDEAL TARGETS FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE:

TOTAL CHOLESTEROL: **Below 200**

LDL (often called "bad" cholesterol): **Under 100**

HDL ("good" cholesterol—it removes excess cholesterol from the blood): **60 or higher**

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