

Cholesterol Testing

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that is created and used by our bodies to keep us healthy. We can also get cholesterol from food, specifically, animal sources. It is important to keep cholesterol levels in a healthy range because excess cholesterol causes plaque to form within the artery walls, making it difficult for blood to circulate throughout the body.

What are the different types of cholesterol?

Cholesterol cannot be dissolved in the blood; it must be transported by carriers called lipoproteins. The two main types of lipoproteins are low-density lipoproteins (LDL) and high-density lipoproteins (HDL). Both LDL and HDL carry cholesterol to and from cells all over the body.

LDL cholesterol is known as the “bad” cholesterol because it contributes to the buildup of plaque in arteries. Plaque causes arteries to be less flexible and can cause clots to form in an artery. If a clot blocks blood flow to the heart, a heart attack can occur. If a clot blocks blood flow to the brain, a stroke can occur.

HDL cholesterol is known as the “good” cholesterol. It helps remove LDL cholesterol from arteries, preventing plaque buildup. The HDL cholesterol will carry the LDL cholesterol back to the liver to be broken down and removed from the body. High levels of HDL cholesterol have been shown to decrease one’s risk of having a heart attack and stroke, while low levels of HDL increase one’s risk of cardiovascular disease.

Triglycerides are a type of fat found in the blood and is factored into your total cholesterol levels. Typically, when you eat a lot of carbohydrates or sugar, your body converts them into triglycerides. This is stored in fat cells throughout your body. High triglyceride levels can be caused by being overweight, physical inactivity, tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, and a diet high in carbohydrates.

Why is it important to get your cholesterol levels checked?

Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States so it is important to keep levels in a healthy range in order to reduce your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

How often should you get your levels checked?

According to the American Heart Association, all adults age 20 or older should have their cholesterol checked every four to six years. If you have a family history of heart attack or stroke, they recommend getting tested more often.

What does this test measure?

The test will check the following levels in your body: total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and triglycerides. It is best to fast (not eat for nine to 12 hours) prior to the test for accurate results. LDL cholesterol and triglycerides can be affected by the food you have recently consumed, so some labs will not even provide the results for these values if you did not fast prior to the test. Depending on where you have the blood work done, they may prick your finger or take a small sample from your arm. The following explains the different cholesterol levels:

Total Cholesterol

- **Desirable:** Less than 200mg/dL
- **Borderline High:** 200-239mg/dL
- **High:** 240mg/dL and above

LDL (Bad) Cholesterol

- **Optimal:** Less than 100mg/dL
- **Near Optimal/Above Optimal:** 100-129mg/dL
- **Borderline High:** 130-159mg/dL
- **High:** 160-189mg/dL
- **Very High:** 190mg/dL and above

HDL (Good) Cholesterol

- **A major risk factor for heart disease:** Less than 40 mg/dL
- **Less of a risk factor, but could be higher:** 40-59mg/dL
- **Considered protective against heart disease:** 60mg/dL and higher

Triglycerides

- **Normal:** Less than 150mg/dL
- **Borderline High:** 150-199mg/dL
- **High:** 200-499mg/dL
- **Very High:** 500mg/dL and higher

Resources

- The American Heart Association: www.heart.org/HEARTORG

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-LINK

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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