

Cholesterol Testing

Why, How, and What It Means to You

Tests don't end when we finish school or get a license to drive—they're a part of life. Managing high cholesterol includes tests, too—tests that give important information about our bodies and our health.

As you and your doctor work together to safeguard your health, you'll have tests done to measure your cholesterol and to see how your body is responding. The tests are simple to take, and the results can help you take a healthy new direction—or stay on one.



Why Have a Cholesterol Test?

Cholesterol is closely linked with heart disease: the higher your blood cholesterol level, the greater your chance of having heart disease or a heart attack. Unfortunately, since high cholesterol itself doesn't cause any visible symptoms, many people aren't even aware they have it. This is why it's important to have a cholesterol test.

Testing is important for more people than you might think. Experts recommend that everyone over the age of 20 be *tested at least once every 5 years*.

The recommended cholesterol test is a blood test called a *lipoprotein profile*. The test is done after a fast of 9 to 12 hours.

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Cholesterol tests results:	
Total Cholesterol	185 mg/dL
LDL Cholesterol	90 mg/dL
HDL Cholesterol	65 mg/dL
Triglycerides Level	142 mg/dL

How a Cholesterol Test Is Done

To obtain the blood sample, blood is usually drawn from a vein on the inside of the elbow or from the back of the hand. First, the area is cleaned with antiseptic, then a band or cuff is fitted around the upper arm. A needle is inserted into a vein to collect the blood into a vial or syringe. Some people may feel momentary pain, but for many, the process is practically painless.

What the Test Shows

A cholesterol test will show your numbers for

- Total cholesterol
- “Bad” low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol—the kind that can build up in your body and affect your arteries
- “Good” high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol—the kind that helps prevent cholesterol buildup
- Triglycerides—a type of fat in your blood

Here are the guidelines for cholesterol levels from the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP). (The “mg/dL” after the numbers means that cholesterol is measured in milligrams [mg] of cholesterol per deciliter [dL] of blood.)

TOTAL CHOLESTEROL LEVEL	WHAT IT MEANS
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline high
240 mg/dL and above	High

LDL (BAD) CHOLESTEROL LEVEL	WHAT IT MEANS
Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100-129 mg/dL	Near or above optimal
130-159 mg/dL	Borderline high
160-189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL or higher	Very high

HDL (GOOD) CHOLESTEROL LEVEL	WHAT IT MEANS
60 mg/dL or higher	High
Less than 40 mg/dL	Low

TRIGLYCERIDES LEVEL	WHAT IT MEANS
Less than 150 mg/dL	Normal
150-199 mg/dL	Borderline high
200-499 mg/dL	High
500 mg/dL or higher	Very high

Remember

Lowering high cholesterol levels reduces the chance of heart disease. Since people with high cholesterol don't have any visible signs or symptoms, the recommended cholesterol test is the first step toward improving your "grade" in the most important test of all—your own good health.