

## Your Test: Cholesterol Test



### What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a kind of fat your body makes. You also get it from foods that come from animals, such as beef, milk and dairy foods, eggs, chicken, and fish.

Your body needs some cholesterol. But when you have too much, it can build up in your blood vessels called arteries. This problem is called atherosclerosis. It is the starting point for most heart and blood flow problems, including heart attacks and strokes.

### Cholesterol test results

A blood test is used to check your cholesterol levels. Your test will show several results:

**Total cholesterol.** This is the sum of all of the different types of cholesterol in blood.

**LDL** (low-density lipoprotein) is the "bad" cholesterol. High LDL can raise your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

**HDL** (high-density lipoprotein) is the "good" cholesterol. High HDL is linked with a lower risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

**Triglycerides** are another type of fat in the blood. High triglycerides may raise your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Talk with your doctor about your test results and your risk for heart attack and stroke.

### What do your cholesterol levels mean?

Your cholesterol levels can help your doctor find out your risk for having a heart attack or stroke.

But it's not just about your cholesterol. Your doctor uses your cholesterol levels plus other things to calculate your risk. These include:

- Your blood pressure.
- Whether or not you have diabetes.
- Your age, sex, and race.
- Whether or not you smoke.

You and your doctor can talk about whether you need to lower your risk and what treatment is best for you.

### What affects cholesterol levels?

**Your diet.** Foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol can raise your cholesterol. Saturated fat and cholesterol are in foods that come from animals, such as meats, whole milk, egg yolks, butter, and cheese. Trans fat is found in fried foods and packaged foods, such as cookies, crackers, and chips.

**Your weight.** Being overweight may raise triglycerides and lower HDL ("good" cholesterol).

**Your activity level.** Not exercising may raise triglycerides and lower HDL ("good" cholesterol).

**Your age.** After you reach age 20, your cholesterol starts to rise. In men, cholesterol levels usually level off after age 50. In women, cholesterol levels stay fairly low until menopause. After that, they rise to about the same level as in men.

**Your family.** A disease called a lipid disorder also can cause high cholesterol. This rare problem runs in families.

**Cigarette smoking.** Smoking can lower your HDL or "good" cholesterol.

### Questions to ask your doctor

Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit. You may want to ask your doctor these questions:

- What is my risk for heart attack and stroke?
- Should I do something to help lower my risk?
- What lifestyle changes can help me stay healthy? How can I make changes that will last?
- Should I think about taking medicine?

Write down any other questions or concerns.