

Cholesterol and Other Lipid Tests



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PATHOLOGY

Diabetes Australia recommends that people with diabetes have a blood cholesterol test once every three years, and annually for people with high cardiovascular risk. The Heart Foundation recommends that all adults over 45 years old have a regular blood cholesterol test every few years.

People younger than 45 who are at higher risk of coronary heart disease, for example, those who have a family history of raised cholesterol, heart disease or high blood pressure, should also have a regular cholesterol test.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE HIGH CHOLESTEROL?

You don't - it doesn't produce any symptoms and many people first learn they have high cholesterol when they have a heart attack or a stroke.

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Most cholesterol is manufactured in the liver from fats in our diet. The liver makes cholesterol and attaches it to carrier proteins called lipoproteins.

WHAT ARE LDL & HDL?

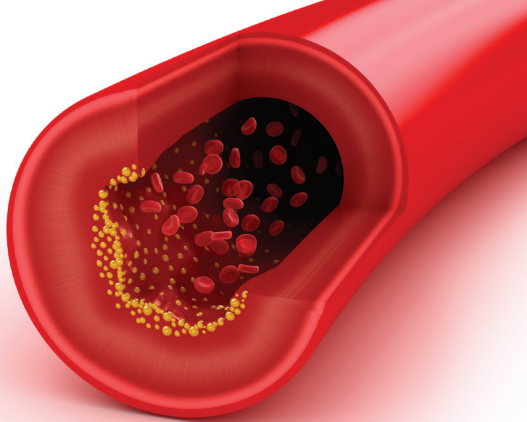
There are two major types of lipoproteins - low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL).

LDL is the major carrier of cholesterol from the liver to the rest of the body. When cholesterol levels are excessive, LDL deposits cholesterol onto the arteries, causing the damage. LDL is sometimes called 'bad cholesterol'.

HDL soaks up cholesterol from the bloodstream and takes it back to the liver. It reduces cholesterol and lessens the chance of it being deposited in the arteries. HDL is sometimes called 'good cholesterol'.

The more HDL you have and the less LDL - that is, the lower the ratio of LDL to HDL - the lower your risk of artery disease.

How much LDL and HDL you have in your blood is influenced by the types of fats you eat as well as genes inherited from your parents.



Artist's impression of plaque building on the blood vessel wall.

Source: www.istockphoto.com.

WHAT ARE TRIGLYCERIDES?

You store fat in your body in the form of triglycerides. You will have some triglycerides in your blood all the time as your muscles use these for energy. When you eat, you will have extra triglycerides in your blood as it's being carried away for storage. That is why your blood is tested after fasting, so the extra triglycerides aren't being measured.

HOW ARE CHOLESTEROL AND TRIGLYCERIDES TESTED?

The test is a simple blood test taken after a period of fasting (not eating) for 8 hours. Depending on which test your doctor ordered, cholesterol may be reported as a single total cholesterol value or HDL may also be reported in addition to the total cholesterol.

A Lipid Studies test will only report total cholesterol as a single value and triglycerides. Your doctor may want to know the exact level of HDL (good cholesterol) and LDL (bad cholesterol). You may need an additional blood test to measure this.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU BE TESTED?

Speak with your doctor about how often you should be tested as it will be influenced by your age, your family history and your general health.

For further information, please speak with your doctor.



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