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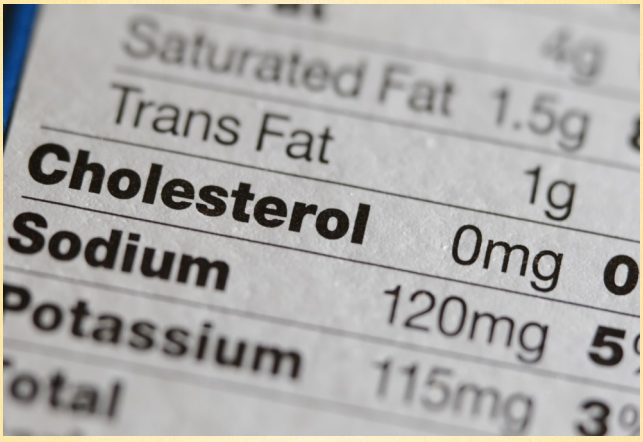
The Health Herald

The Cholesterol Report

We hear the terms "LDL," "HDL," and "cholesterol" everyday, even on commercials for Cheerios. But what actually are they? Why should you be concerned with them?

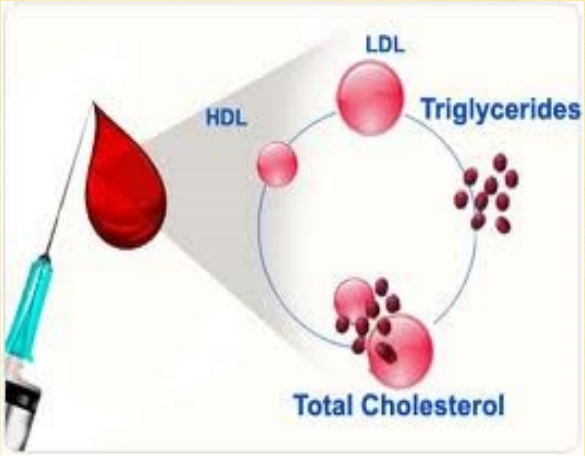
High Density Lipoprotein (HDL) is rumored to be "good" cholesterol. It removes excess cholesterol from the bloodstream and transports it to the liver where it is sometimes converted into bile acids to aid in digestion. high density lipoprotein is smaller than low density lipoprotein and carries more proteins than lipids.



Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) is rumored to be the "bad" cholesterol. It transports cholesterol to the cells when it is needed for the cells to function. Low density protein is larger than High Density Protein and contains more lipids than proteins

So LDL and HDL aren't actually cholesterol at all, they are just the proteins that transport it to all parts of our body. Our body needs cholesterol for many aspects of our lives: everything from brain synapses to digestive processes. However, too much of this "good thing" isn't good at all.

—Jasmyne N. Post

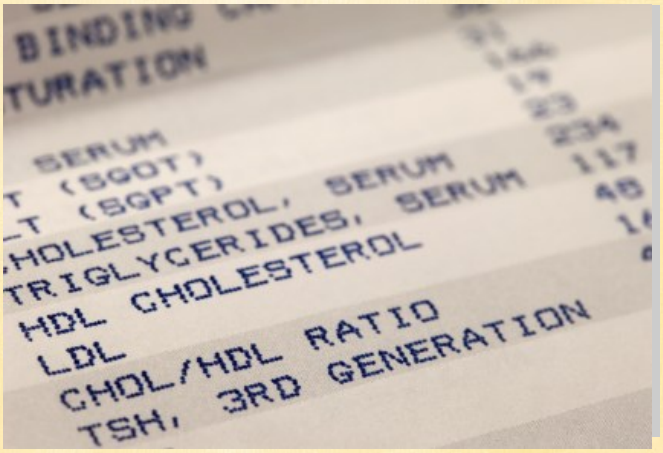


Cholesterol Tests

What do my results actually mean?

By Dr. Robert M. Clark MD, FACC

So you just got a cholesterol test done by your doctor. What exactly are they measuring? What should your results be? A blood lipid panel is a test done by your doctor to analyze the amounts of total cholesterol, LDLs, HDLs, and triglycerides (fats) in your bloodstream.



These numbers all have ranges that they should fall in, because being outside of them could show an elevated risk for heart disease. Some people who exhibit other risk factors for heart disease should monitor these numbers carefully.

These are the guidelines published by the American Heart Association:

Total Blood Cholesterol- <200 mg/dL
LDL Level- <100 mg/dL
HDL Level- 49-60 mg/dL
Triglyceride Level- <150 mg/dL

Keeping your blood lipid results within these levels isn't easy. It requires great persistence and diligence, but in the end, a healthy life is the most important thing a person can have.

Ask The Expert

Q: I hear the word triglyceride a lot when people discuss cholesterol. What is a triglyceride and should I be worried about it in the context of my heart health?
-Kathy, Virginia
A: Triglycerides are a type of fat that your body creates by converting unused calories from meals into a potential energy source. They are often discussed with cholesterol because both are similar in the fact that both are not dissolved in the blood, but rather are circulated throughout your body with the help of lipoproteins. Triglycerides are an important aspect of heart health, and are monitored by your doctor using the same tests as used for cholesterol.

Q: How do I know if I am at risk for high cholesterol?
-Diana, North Dakota
A: Many factors can put a person at risk for heart disease. These include diet, exercise, age, gender, and your gene pool. If you are concerned or are experiencing symptoms of high cholesterol, consult your physician or have a discussion with your family to see if the condition runs in your immediate circle.

Q: How can having high cholesterol levels lead to atherosclerosis?
-Tommy, Illinois
A: When cholesterol levels are high in the bloodstream, they tend to start forming a plaque in the vessels When this plaque worsens it can cause the vessels to harden, which is the cause of atherosclerosis.

Have a Question or Concern?!?
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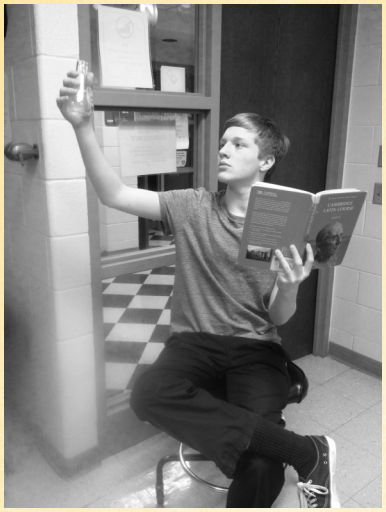
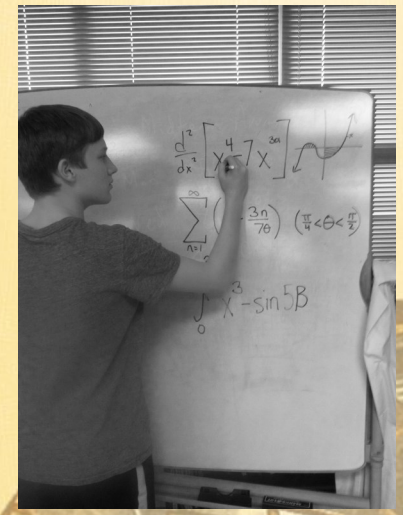
A Healthy Lifestyle

The weekly column by Psychologist Dr. William M. Smith MD, PhD

Patients can primarily change their diet to change the amount of HDL and LDL they consume. Many animal based products , along with commercially produced products contain a high amount of saturated and trans fats. These fats raise the concentration of LDL in the blood. Nearly all whole fat dairy foods contain saturated fats. These products, such as eggnog, cheese, ice cream, butter, and sour cream, are consumed very often. LDL is also found in red meats, like lamb and beef. To change the amount of LDL in the blood stream, all you have to do is eat less of these foods, and your level should go down, and vice versa, you can eat more to increase your levels. To increase your HDL levels, eat foods such as nuts, seafood, avocado, olive oil and oatmeal that contain a high level of polyunsaturated fats. A benefit to these types of fats is that they also lower the LDL in your blood stream, so it's a win-win situation in eating in these foods. Of course, eating most foods will increase your cholesterol levels anyway. However, most foods that contain more LDL will contain fats, that can negatively affect your health, as LDL can get clogged in your blood vessels, and end up with serious medical consequences, such as heart attack, stroke, and even death. HDL can help lower the amount of clogged LDL in your blood stream, which of course would reduce serious health factors, and can in fact improve overall health.





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This special cholesterol issue outlines all of today's health concerns about cholesterol. What is cholesterol? What are LDL and HDL? What numbers should you shoot for in a lipid panel? These and more are addressed in this month's issue.

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