

February

How's your cholesterol? Time to get it checked!

Keeping your cholesterol levels healthy is a great way to keep your heart healthy – and lower your chances of getting heart disease or having a stroke.

But first, you have to know your cholesterol numbers.

The American Heart Association recommends all adults age 20 or older have their cholesterol, and other traditional risk factors, checked every four to six years.

Your test report will show your cholesterol levels in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL). Your total cholesterol and HDL (good) cholesterol are among numerous factors your doctor can use to predict your lifetime or 10-year risk for a heart attack or stroke.

Your test report will show your cholesterol levels in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL). To determine how your cholesterol levels affect your risk of heart disease, your doctor will also take into account other risk factors such as age, family history, smoking and high blood pressure.

A complete fasting lipoprotein profile will show the following for:

Total blood (or serum) cholesterol

Your total cholesterol score is calculated using the following equation: HDL + LDL + 20 percent of your triglyceride level. A total cholesterol score of less than 180 mg/dL is considered optimal.

HDL (good) cholesterol

With HDL cholesterol, higher levels are better. Low HDL cholesterol puts you at higher risk for heart disease. People with high blood triglycerides usually also have lower HDL cholesterol. Genetic factors, type 2 diabetes, and certain drugs, such as beta-blockers and anabolic steroids, also lower HDL cholesterol levels. Smoking, being overweight and being sedentary can all result in lower HDL cholesterol.

LDL (bad) cholesterol

A low LDL cholesterol level is considered good for your heart health. However, your LDL number should no longer be the main factor in guiding treatment to prevent heart attack and stroke, according to new guidelines from the American Heart Association. For patients taking statins, the guidelines say they no longer need to get

LDL cholesterol levels down to a specific target number. A diet high in saturated and trans fats raises LDL cholesterol.

Triglycerides

Triglyceride is the most common type of fat in the body. Normal triglyceride levels vary by age and sex. A high triglyceride level combined with low HDL cholesterol or high LDL cholesterol is associated with atherosclerosis, the buildup of fatty deposits in artery walls that increases the risk for heart attack and stroke

AHA Recommendation

We recommend that all adults age 20 or older have their cholesterol and other traditional risk factors checked every four to six years, and work with their healthcare providers to determine their risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke.