

# Total Cholesterol

A total cholesterol test is used to screen for the risk of developing heart disease. Because high blood cholesterol has been associated with the hardening of arteries, called atherosclerosis, and an increased risk of death from heart attacks, cholesterol testing is considered a routine part of preventative healthcare.

## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that naturally occurs in human blood and is essential for life. It is created in the liver and comes from the foods you eat. Cholesterol forms the membranes for cells in all organs and tissues in the body. It is used to make hormones that are essential for development, growth, and reproduction, and it forms bile acids that are needed to absorb nutrients from food.

## How often should I have my cholesterol checked?

Adults should be tested at least once every five years, or more frequently if being treated for high cholesterol or have one or more risk factors for heart disease. Children, teens, and young adults should be tested once between the ages of 9 and 11 and then again between the ages of 17 and 21.

## Will this test tell me about my good (HDL) and bad (LDL) cholesterol levels?

The total cholesterol test will only provide you with the total amount of cholesterol in your blood. If you would prefer a breakdown of your cholesterol levels, you will need to have a cardiac screen, or lipid panel, performed.

## What should I do if my results are abnormal or out of range?

It is always recommended you meet with a healthcare provider to determine what your laboratory test results mean to you. Your healthcare provider will review all of your test results and, combined with your health history, will be able to provide an accurate picture of your health status.

**If your results were within normal range:** If your cholesterol is in the desirable range, below 200 mg/dl for adults, you should follow the screening guidelines for your age and health status.

**If your results were in the borderline high range:** A total cholesterol between 200 and 239 mg/dl is considered to be a moderate risk for heart disease. Your healthcare provider may order a lipid panel to determine your bad and good cholesterol levels. Your healthcare provider may also suggest lifestyle changes, such as improved diet and exercise habits.

**If your results were in the high risk range:** Cholesterol levels greater than or equal to 240 mg/dl is considered high risk. Your healthcare provider may order a lipid panel to try to determine the cause of the high cholesterol. Once a cause has been determined, appropriate treatment, which may include medication, will be prescribed.

## What other resources are available to learn more about my health and laboratory tests?

- American Heart Association: [heart.org](http://heart.org)
- Lab Tests Online: [labtestsonline.org](http://labtestsonline.org)
- WebMD: [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

*DLO Direct offers direct access to laboratory testing for informational purposes. A DLO Direct lab test result is not a medical diagnosis and is not intended as medical advice. Only a healthcare provider can interpret lab results and diagnose a medical condition or disease.*

*Because tests have not been ordered by a healthcare provider, third party entities, including Medicare and Medicaid, will not reimburse for these tests.*

## FASTING REQUIRED

Fasting is required for a total cholesterol test. Please **DO NOT** eat or drink anything except water for 8-12 hours before your test. **DO NOT** stop taking your prescription medications. If your healthcare provider advised you to take your medication with food, consult with your healthcare provider before fasting.



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