

Understanding Cholesterol Numbers

Cholesterol levels should be measured at least once every five years by everyone over the age of 20. The screening test that is usually performed is a blood test called a lipoprotein profile. Experts recommend that men aged 35 and older and women age 45 and older be routinely screened for lipid disorders. The lipoprotein profile includes:

LDL (low density lipoprotein cholesterol, also called "bad" cholesterol)

HDL (high density lipoprotein cholesterol, also called "good" cholesterol)

Triglycerides (fats carried in the blood from the food we eat. Excess calories, alcohol, or sugar in the body are converted into triglycerides and stored in fat cells throughout the body.)

Results of your blood test will come in the forms of numbers. Here is how to interpret your cholesterol numbers:

LDL Cholesterol

LDL cholesterol can build up on the walls of your arteries and increase your chances of getting heart disease. That is why LDL cholesterol is referred to as "bad" cholesterol. The lower your LDL cholesterol number, the better it is for your health. The table below explains what the numbers mean.

LDL Cholesterol	LDL-Cholesterol Category
Less than 100	Optimal
100 - 129	Near optimal/above optimal
130 - 159	Borderline high
160 - 189	High
190 and above	Very high

If you have heart disease or blood vessel disease, some experts recommend that you should try to get your LDL cholesterol below 70. For people with diabetes or other multiple risk factors for heart disease, the treatment goal is to reach an LDL of less than 100.

HDL Cholesterol

When it comes to HDL cholesterol -- "good" cholesterol -- the higher the number, the better it is for your health. This is because HDL cholesterol protects against heart disease by taking the "bad" cholesterol out of your blood and keeping it from building up in your arteries. The table below explains what the numbers mean.

HDL Cholesterol	HDL-Cholesterol Category
60 and above	High; Optimal; helps to lower risk of heart disease
Less than 40 in men and less than 50 in women	Low; considered a risk factor for heart disease

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are the chemical form in which most fat exists in food and the body. A high triglyceride level has been linked to the occurrence of coronary artery disease in some people. Here's the breakdown.

Triglycerides	Triglyceride Category
Less than 150	Normal

150 - 199	Borderline high
200 - 499	High
500 or higher	Very high

Total Cholesterol

Your total blood cholesterol is a measure of LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and other lipid components. Doctors recommend total cholesterol levels below 200

Total Cholesterol	Category
Less than 200	Desirable
200 - 239	Borderline High
240 and above	High

Source: WebMD.com