Cholesterol and other lipid tests

This brochure provides a simple explanation of Cholesterol & Lipid testing and who the National Heart Foundation recommends should be tested.

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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 only when they have a heart attack or a stroke.

Who should be tested?

The National 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, high blood pressure and/or diabetes, should also have a regular cholesterol test.

The test is a simple blood test taken after a period of fasting (not eating) for 8 hours. The test measures the total cholesterol level (LDL plus HDL and other fats called triglycerides).

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 molecules made of fat and protein called lipoproteins.

What are LDL & HDL?

There are two major types of 'carrier' 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 the "bad cholesterol" in lay literature.

HDL, on the other hand, mops up cholesterol from the bloodstream and takes it back to the liver. So it reduces cholesterol, and lessens the chance of it being deposited in the arteries. HDL is sometimes called the "good cholesterol" in lay literature.

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

How much LDL and HDL you have in your blood is influenced by the types of fats we eat.

How often should you be tested?

Ask your Doctor the next time you see him or her, how often you should be tested . It will be influenced by your age, your family history and your general health.

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