

# Total Cholesterol Test

## What is the total cholesterol test?

This blood test measures a kind of fat (lipid) called cholesterol. Your body makes some cholesterol and gets the rest from foods such as meats, eggs, and some milk products.

Your body needs small amounts of cholesterol to make hormones and to build and keep healthy cells throughout the body. However, too much cholesterol can cause problems that increase your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

The total cholesterol test measures the sum of the different types of lipids that carry cholesterol in your blood. The 2 most important lipids are high-density lipoprotein (HDL) and low-density lipoprotein (LDL).

## Why is this test done?

The total cholesterol test helps check your risk for heart disease or atherosclerosis, which is a hardening, narrowing, or blockage of the arteries.

If you have changed your diet and exercise habits or are taking medicine to lower your cholesterol levels, this test can show how well your treatment is working.

## How do I prepare for this test?

- You may not need to fast overnight before this blood test unless other lipid tests are also being done. Ask your healthcare provider about this.
- Cholesterol levels are affected by fat in your diet. Avoid eating fatty foods the evening before your test.
- Don't drink any alcohol for 24 hours before the test.
- You may need to avoid taking certain medicines before the test because they might affect the test result. Make sure your healthcare provider knows about any medicines, herbs, or supplements that you are taking. Don't stop any of your regular medicines without first consulting with your healthcare provider.
- Talk to your healthcare provider before the day of your test if you have any questions about how to prepare.

## How is the test done?

A small amount of blood is taken from your arm with a needle or from your finger with a lancet (a short, pointed knife-blade or knifelike tool). The blood is sent to a lab.

Having this test will take just a few minutes.

## **How will I get the test result?**

Ask your healthcare provider when and how you will get the result of your test.

## **What does the test result mean?**

Your total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL (milligrams per deciliter).

Some of the reasons your total cholesterol may be too high are:

- You have inherited a tendency to have high cholesterol.
- You eat too much saturated and trans fat (butter, whole milk, red meat, fried fast food, processed food).
- You need to lose weight.
- You don't get enough exercise.
- You have hypothyroidism.
- You take certain medicines, such as steroids, beta blockers, or birth control pills.

## **What if my test result is high?**

Test results are only one part of a larger picture that takes into account your medical history and current health. Sometimes a test needs to be repeated to check the first result. Talk to your healthcare provider about your result and ask questions.

If your test result is not normal, ask your healthcare provider:

- If you need additional tests
- What you can do to work toward a normal value or what kind of treatment you may need
- When you need to be tested again

Developed by RelayHealth.

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