

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

Cholesterol and Your Heart Health

The secret number you need to know about

If you know the number of your total cholesterol, that's good. But is it good enough?

What's in a Number

There are two main types of fat in your blood – cholesterol and triglycerides. In the past, doctors thought that total cholesterol was a good indicator of the risk for heart disease, heart attack, diabetes and stroke. The lower your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) numbers and the higher your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) numbers, the better, right? While measuring total cholesterol, HDL and LDL cholesterol is helpful, experts now know that to truly assess your risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke, it's not as simple as just measuring these numbers.

The Lipoprotein Link

Research indicates that the blockage of arteries that leads to heart disease is caused by the amount and size of the lipoprotein particles that carry your cholesterol throughout your body. These lipoprotein particles can build up in your arteries. No matter how much cholesterol you take in when you eat, or genetically inherit, it's the number and size of these lipoprotein particles that carry it that contributes to heart disease, heart attack etc. Think of it this way: These lipoproteins are the cars that carry passengers (cholesterol) along the highway –

it's not the number of "passengers" in a car that causes a traffic jam (blocked artery), it's the number of cars!

Your Particle Number

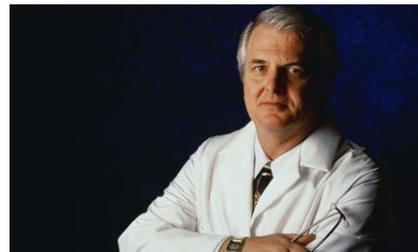
The number of and particle size of lipoproteins in your blood are the measurements that can really help your doctor determine your true risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke. A screening test called a NMR LipoProfile is recently available, which provides a more detailed look at how your particles measure up, better assessing your risk for complications. The number of LDL particles circulating in your blood is the most important factor in measuring your heart health. The secret number or "magic" number is your LDL particle number:

- How many there are; and
- How big they are.

The more LDL particles you have, the higher your risk. The smaller your LDL particles are, the higher your risk is as well. Generally, the lower your number of total LDL particles, and the larger the size of these particles – the better.

Getting Tested

Currently, most patients, and many doctors, are not even aware that a simple blood test exists that can analyze your other cholesterol numbers in such detail. Those that do, however, realize it is an invaluable tool necessary for early prediction, prevention and treatment of heart attack, heart disease and stroke. If you have a family history or other risk factors for heart attack, heart disease and stroke, or have already been diagnosed with high cholesterol (even if you are already being treated for it) you should ask your doctor about having an NMR Lipoprofile test. It is currently covered by many private insurance carriers, although different rates and coverage do apply. If your insurance doesn't cover it, have it done anyway. It is relatively inexpensive, and just may be the best money you ever spend!



Did you know...?

Medical science shows that you can be at an increased risk for heart disease even if you have normal cholesterol levels. Ask your doctor what your LDL, LDL-C and LDL-P numbers are. You could be at risk, especially if you have diabetes.