understanding cholesterol

What is cholesterol?
Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in the bloodstream and all your body’s cells. Your body makes about 75% percent of the cholesterol in your blood, and the other 25% comes from the foods you eat, according to the American Heart Association.

Why check it?
Although your body needs a certain amount of cholesterol to function, having too much in your blood greatly increases your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. High cholesterol levels signal this risk. Even if you eat right and exercise, you may still be at risk for high cholesterol, so it’s important to have your levels checked regularly and discuss them with your doctor.

What do cholesterol tests measure?
A blood cholesterol test, or lipoprotein profile, gives you information about the amounts and types of cholesterol in your bloodstream, measured in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL):

- **LDL** (low-density lipoprotein) is the “bad” type of cholesterol, because it promotes the buildup of artery-clogging plaque in your bloodstream.
- **HDL** (high-density lipoprotein) is the “good” type, because it removes dangerous LDL cholesterol from your arteries and helps protect you from heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.
- Total cholesterol is the combination of all types of cholesterol in your blood.
- Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. High levels increase your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

What should my cholesterol levels be?

**Total cholesterol**
- **Desirable** (lower risk): Less than 200 mg/dL
- **Borderline high** (higher risk): 200 to 239 mg/dL
- **High** (more than twice the desirable level of risk): 240 mg/dL and above

**HDL cholesterol**
Unlike other cholesterol, the higher your HDL levels, the better.
- **Low HDL** (higher risk): Less than 40 mg/dL for men
- **Low HDL** (higher risk): Less than 50 mg/dL for women
- **The higher, the better**: 40 to 59 mg/dL
- **High HDL** (lower risk): 60 mg/dL and above

**LDL cholesterol**
- **Less than 70 mg/dL** (optimal if you’re at very high risk of a heart attack)
- **Less than 100 mg/dL** (optimal for people with heart disease or diabetes)
- **Near or above normal**: 100 to 129 mg/dL
- **Borderline high**: 130 to 159 mg/dL
- **High**: 160 to 189 mg/dL

**Triglycerides**
- **Normal**: Less than 150 mg/dL
- **Borderline high**: 150 to 199 mg/dL
- **High**: 200 to 499 mg/dL
- **Very high**: 500 mg/dL and above

Call your doctor today to schedule an annual checkup