

# Live Well, Work Well

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## Cholesterol and Your Heart Health

High cholesterol increases your chances of developing heart disease—the leading cause of death for adults in the United States. Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in fats in your blood which your body needs to function. Having too much cholesterol, though, can be dangerous for your health.

### What's in a Number?

In the past, doctors thought that total cholesterol was a good indicator of one's 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—or so they thought.

While measuring HDL, LDL and total cholesterol is helpful, many experts now believe that assessing the size of lipoprotein particles can also be beneficial.

### The Lipoprotein Link

Research indicates that the blockage of arteries (which often leads to heart disease) is caused by the number and size of the lipoprotein particles that carry cholesterol throughout your body. These lipoprotein particles can build up in your arteries.

Think of it this way: These lipoproteins are the “cars” that carry “passengers” (cholesterol) along the “highways” (arteries)—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 and particle size of lipoproteins in your blood are the measurements that can help your doctor determine your risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke. Simple blood tests are available that can provide a more detailed look at how your particles measure up.

The number of LDL particles circulating in your blood is an important factor in evaluating your heart health. Generally, the lower your number of total LDL particles, and the larger the size of these particles, the lower your risk is for heart disease, heart attack and stroke.

### Getting Tested

The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends routine cholesterol screenings for men over the age of 35 and women over the 45. Screenings may also be appropriate for younger adults who possess certain risk factors, such as a family history of cardiovascular disease.

By being proactive and seeking preventive care, you can help catch high cholesterol early and reduce your risk of developing heart disease.