



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at Sullivan Benefits

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CHOLESTEROL AND YOUR HEART HEALTH

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

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, right? While measuring HDL, LDL and total 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 knowing these numbers.

The Lipoprotein Link

Research indicates that no matter how much cholesterol you inherit or take in when you eat, the blockage of arteries that 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 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 and particle size of lipoproteins in your blood are the measurements that can really help your doctor determine your risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke. A screening test called an NMR LipoProfile® is available, which provides a more detailed look at how your particles measure up. The number of LDL particles circulating in your blood is the most important factor in measuring your heart health. It is important to know how many there are and how big they are. 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

Currently, most patients and many doctors are not even aware that a simple blood test exists that can analyze your cholesterol numbers in such detail. Those who do, however, realize that it is a valuable 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), 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, consider having it done anyway. The test is relatively inexpensive, and the results you get are important for your health.