

Understanding Lab Values

Let's start with your blood pressure. You are always told numbers but rarely does one understand them. The top number is called the systolic and the lower number is called the diastolic pressure. This means the systolic reading is the amount of pressure your heart generates on your arteries as it pumps blood to the rest of the body. The lower number or diastolic reading is the amount of pressure in your arteries when your heart is at rest. Did you know that with each beat of your heart, your blood is forced through 60,000 miles of arteries, veins and capillaries? This can circulate about 2,000 gallons of blood each day. Your blood pressure can vary from one moment to the next depending on what activity you are engaged in. The recommended normal is 120/80 or lower with the optimal being 115/75. The higher the blood pressure the higher the risk for cardiovascular disease.

Knowing your cholesterol, HDL and LDL number is important because it deals with your cardiovascular status. Cholesterol is a fatty substance that is necessary for proper cell function. There are two forms of cholesterol, HDL and LDL. Your total number for cholesterol should be less than 200mg/dl. If you have high levels of cholesterol then there is a possibility that you could develop coronary heart disease.

The good cholesterol is called HDL, (High Density Lipids). Its purpose is to carry away the cholesterol from the blood vessels to the liver so it can be eliminated. The higher the lab value for good cholesterol, the lower the risk for heart disease. It should be noted that proper diet and exercise can also raise the HDL. A lab value for the HDL should be greater than or equal to 35mg/dl.

The bad cholesterol is called LDL, (Low Density Lipids). This is the part of the cholesterol that leaves deposits within the vessel walls. You can help this value if you alter your diet by decreasing your fat intake. The lab value for LDL should be less than 130mg/dl.

Everyone should have an idea of what their triglycerides run. Triglycerides are fat found in nature, consumed in foods and are stored in the form of fat within the body. This fat provides the body with needed energy. Higher risk of heart disease has been associated with high fasting triglycerides. Your acceptable lab values should be less than 200mg/dl.

Do you know what your sugar runs? This is your fasting glucose lab value. Glucose is important for the metabolism of the body. The brain and cell tissues use glucose for energy. It is absorbed in the small intestines and then is stored as glycogen in the liver. Glucose is necessary for organs to function and is obtained from the foods we eat. A fasting lab value should be in a range of 64-128mg/dl.

We have only reviewed a few lab values. Sometimes winter can make us complacent so it is important to remember to exercise, rest, eat right and don't smoke! As always, if you have any questions or comments, please eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov