

BLOOD TESTS FOR HEART DISEASE

Your blood offers many clues about your heart health. Excessive levels of “bad” cholesterol in your blood, for instance, can be a sign that you’re at increased risk of developing life-threatening blockages in your coronary arteries. C-reactive protein (CRP) may indicate whether you’re likely to have a heart attack.

CARDIAC ENZYMES

Cardiac enzymes are proteins your body produces to help promote natural biochemical reactions that keep cells functioning normally. Damage to your heart can send excessive levels of cardiac enzymes into your bloodstream.

C-REACTIVE PROTEIN

C-reactive protein (CRP) is a protein your liver produces as part of your immune system response to injury or infection. It’s also produced by muscle cells within the coronary arteries. CRP is a nonspecific sign of inflammation, which means it may not be clear what’s causing the inflammation. Inflammation plays a central role in atherosclerosis, in which fatty deposits clog your arteries.

FIBRINOGEN

Fibrinogen is a protein in your blood that plays a central role in blood clotting. But too much may promote excessive clumping of platelets, the type of blood cell largely responsible for clotting. This can cause a clot form in an artery, leading to a heart attack or stroke.

HOMOCYSTEINE

Homocysteine is an amino acid your body uses to make protein and to build and maintain tissue. But excessive levels in your blood may increase your risk of stroke, certain types of heart disease, and disease of the blood vessels of the arms, legs and feet (peripheral artery disease). Your doctor may check your homocysteine level if you’ve had cardiovascular problems but don’t have any of the traditional risk factors, such as smoking. Your doctor may also advise screening if any family members developed heart problems at a young age or have high homocysteine levels.

LIPOPROTEIN (A)

Lipoprotein(a) is a type of blood fat (lipid). It’s known as Lp(a), or Lp little-a. It forms when a low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol particle attaches to a specific protein. The protein that carries Lp(a) may disrupt your body’s ability to dissolve blood clots. High levels of Lp(a) may be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, including early heart disease, heart attack and stroke.

NATRIURETIC PEPTIDES

Brain natriuretic peptide, also called B-type natriuretic peptide (BNP), is a protein that your heart and blood vessels produce. BNP acts as a natural diuretic, eliminating fluid, relaxing blood vessels and funneling sodium into the urine. The BNP concentration in your blood can help in the diagnosis and evaluation of heart failure and other heart conditions. When your heart is failing, your body secretes very high levels of BNP into your bloodstream in an effort to ease the potentially dangerous strain on your heart.

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