

BE WELL

Go Ahead, Request These Lab Tests

By **Debbie DeAngelo**
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Walk out of your primary care physician's office and you're likely to have an order for bloodwork in hand. These tests can shed much light on your state of health, how your bodily organs are functioning, and provide clues as to why you're experiencing certain symptoms.

Routine blood work includes many tests, yet you may be surprised to discover what it doesn't include. Whether your family history warrants further testing or if you're a proactive, health-conscious individual, a few additional blood tests are worth discussing with your health care provider. Here are three lab tests you may choose to consider as they yield more in-depth feedback on your health.

Hemoglobin A1c. HbA1c is used to diagnose diabetes and to determine how well you're managing it. It reflects an average of blood sugar levels over the previous two to three months, as opposed to daily or one-time readings.

Historically used to check on long-term blood sugar control in people with diabetes, its use has been extended to people at risk of developing it. This test can give a heads-up about any blood sugar issues that could be developing, including prediabetes. A prime candidate is a person whose fasting blood sugars are increasing over time; especially when accompanied by an elevation in weight, cholesterol and blood pressure. Elevated levels can increase risk of cancer and dementia too.

A normal level is below 5.7 percent. A reading of 5.7-6.4 percent is in the prediabetes range while 6.5 percent or higher is in the diabetes range. The goal for

people already diagnosed with diabetes is less than 7 percent to prevent complications.

High sensitivity c-reactive protein. Hs-CRP for short, this test measures the amount of a specific protein in the blood and is used to gauge risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke.

Also, it's a marker of internal inflammation, which may be occurring in the arteries or any other organ in the body.

Made by the liver in response to inflammation, Hs-CRP indicates the degree of inflammation present, but it does not reveal the cause of it. Potential sources include infections, autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease, periodontal disease, injury, physical trauma, cancer, and smoking.

When evaluating cardiovascular disease risk, Hs-CRP may be used in conjunction with a cholesterol panel and blood sugar testing. A result of 1.0-3.0 indicates moderate risk for future cardiovascular problems.

Vitamin D. Besides strengthening bones, recent evidence shows that nearly every cell in our body uses vitamin d and more people are deficient than previously thought.

Low vitamin D levels are linked to such disorders as osteoporosis, dementia, and poor immune function. We obtain vitamin D from sunshine, foods like fatty fish and egg yolks, as well as dietary supplements. To determine your status, ask your doctor to order a blood test. Although levels of at least 30 ng/ml are considered normal, levels of 50-80 ng/ml are optimal. Most people will require a vitamin D3 supplement to achieve this.

Don't just assume that the tests you need are automatically included in "routine" bloodwork. As with any aspect of your care, be sure to have a full understanding of the situation. For example, ask which labs are being ordered and why, if you have to do anything special to prepare, when you should expect to be contacted with the results, and whether or not it's covered by your insurance. Ideally, determining the blood tests that may benefit you will occur after you and your health care provider discuss your individual circumstances and concerns. This is part of being an informed patient.



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