Know Your Cholesterol Numbers - Know Your Risk

How do your cholesterol numbers measure up? Knowing your numbers are crucial for better understanding your chances of having a heart attack.

1. Know your cholesterol numbers
   A fasting lipoprotein profile measures total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol - the "bad" cholesterol - high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol - the "good" cholesterol - and triglyceride levels. Everyone ages 20 and older should have this blood test at least once every five years.

2. Know your risk for coronary heart disease
   How likely are you to develop heart disease or have a heart attack? People with coronary heart disease or diabetes are at the greatest risk for a heart attack. Others can look at their LDL cholesterol level and other risk factors for coronary heart disease to evaluate their risk. Cholesterol-lowering treatment primarily aims to lower the level of LDL, the main source of artery blockage.
   
   The higher your coronary heart disease risk, the more important it is to decrease your LDL cholesterol level. Other factors affecting your risk include cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL cholesterol, family history and old age.
   
   For a better understanding of how these risk factors and your lipoprotein profile may impact your LDL treatment goal, please consult your Primary Care Physician.

3. Reach your goal
   Many people can reach their LDL goal through therapeutic lifestyle changes to their diet, physical activity and weight. Some, however, also will need medication.
   
   In addition, people with metabolic syndrome - a cluster of risk factors such as obesity, high triglyceride levels and a low HDL level - may need additional treatment after reaching their LDL treatment goal.

For more information, visit the National Cholesterol Education Program Web site at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd or call the NHLBI Health Information Center at 301.592.8573.