

## Your Test: How to Read Your Lab Test Results



Lab tests can help you and your doctor find out what may be wrong with you or what treatment you need.

Your doctor will base a diagnosis or choices about treatment on your lab results, your symptoms, and your past health.

You may not be able to eat or drink liquids for several hours or longer before a lab test.

Be sure to follow your doctor's directions before your test, or the results may not be correct.

### What are normal values?

Most lab results are given as a number that falls within a range of numbers, or values.

Lab reports will have a column of "out of range" values, making it easy for you to spot abnormal results.

Each normal range is different because it is created for a certain group of people, based on age or other factors.

Many healthy people are tested to set normal values for each group. For example, a group of 30- to 40-year-old men would be given a specific test.

The normal range for that group is based on their average results.

Your lab report will show the normal ranges for that lab.

Do not compare results from different labs. A handful of tests, including cholesterol and blood sugar, have standard normal values.

This means that no matter where you have these tests, the normal ranges are the same.

### What if your results are outside the normal range?

Your lab values may be higher or lower than the numbers in the normal range.

In that case, your doctor may want to repeat the test to confirm the results, or order other tests.

Sometimes you can have a lab result outside of the normal range even if nothing is wrong with you.

Many things can affect your test results. These include taking certain medicines, eating before a test, and being pregnant or under stress.

In some cases, a result outside of the normal range may be normal for you.

## Common lab tests

Lab test	Why the test is done
A1c (hemoglobin A1c or glycohemoglobin)	This test checks your average blood sugar (glucose) level over the last few months.
CBC (complete blood count)	This test checks to see how many of each type of blood cell you have.
Chem or SMAC (chemistry screen)	This test measures the levels of several substances (such as electrolytes) in your blood.
CMP (comprehensive metabolic panel)	This test measures your blood sugar level, electrolyte and fluid balance, kidney function, and liver function.
Glucose	This test measures the amount of a type of sugar (glucose) in your blood.
Cholesterol test and lipid profile	These tests measure the amount of different kinds of fat (cholesterol and triglycerides) in your blood.
Pap test (Pap smear)	This test looks for changes in the cells of the cervix that can be a sign of cancer or another health problem.
PSA (prostate-specific antigen)	This test measures the amount of PSA in the blood. Your doctor will use this test to look for problems with the prostate.
PT (prothrombin time)/INR (international normalized ratio)	This test is done to see if you are at risk for bleeding during surgery or a medical test. It also may be done to see how well your medicine to prevent blood clots is working.
TSH (thyroid-stimulating hormone)	This test is used to see if your thyroid gland is working right.