

LAB FAQs

Why do I need bloodwork?

Your doctor orders blood tests to confirm or rule out a suspected illness, to follow the course of a chronic illness, or to see how you are responding to treatment.

What is a Blood Count?

A blood count is a measurement of the amounts and types of blood cells in your body.

How many types of blood cells do I have?

Your body has three main types:

1. **Red Blood Cells (RBC)** help carry oxygen and nutrients to the other cells in your body.
2. **Platelets (PLT)** help clot blood whenever you have a cut or bruise.
3. **White blood cells (WBC)** help prevent infection.

What is a CBC?

A CBC is a Complete Blood Count. It measures your white blood cells (WBC), red blood cells (RBC), hemoglobin (HGB), hematocrit (HCT), platelets (PLT), the size of the red cells (MCV), as well as the mean cell hemoglobin (MCH) and mean cell hemoglobin concentration (MCHC).

White blood cells fight infection. Red blood cells and hemoglobin carry oxygen. If your red cell count falls too low, your heart must work harder to deliver oxygen throughout your body. The hematocrit, mean cell hemoglobin, and mean cell hemoglobin concentration are various ways we measure your red cell count. If your red blood cells or hemoglobin are very low, you may feel tired or become short of breath. Platelets stick together to stop bleeding. If your platelet count is low, a cut may bleed longer than is normal.

How does my illness affect my blood cells?

Some types of cancer causes changes in your blood cell production. Often, white cells are produced too quickly, and they don't have time to mature. So you may have too many non-working white blood cells. This can cause your red blood cells and platelets to be crowded and interrupts their development. When this happens, your body ends up with less defense against infection.

What does a high or low count mean?

These terms describe whether your counts are higher or lower than the normal range for a specific blood test. A high or low blood count has different significance for each individual, depending on his or her health.

What happens if my blood cells are low or immature?

Normally, patients receiving chemotherapy will experience a general reduction in the blood levels of the various types of blood cells due to the effects of the chemotherapy on the bone marrow. This effect on the marrow is called myelosuppression. As a result of this condition you may experience any of the following symptoms:

- An inadequate supply of red blood cells can cause anemia, which leaves you pale, weak, tired and short of breath.
- Inadequate platelets can cause easy bruising, poor healing, and sometimes bleeding.
- Without enough mature white blood cells, you're more susceptible to infection, resulting in colds, cough, sore throat and fever.

What is the normal range?

A normal range for a lab test is based on the test results of a very large number of people. The test results of most, but not all, patients will fall into this normal range. Some healthy patients will always have counts that are lower or higher than the normal range --- that just happens to be normal for these patients.

However, test results may be lower or higher than the normal range if you are ill or if you are receiving treatment. For example, a viral infection will cause your white blood cell count to go up or down. If you are receiving chemotherapy, your WBC will go down, then come back up, each time you receive treatment.

Typically, normal blood count values fall within a range:

RBC = 35% to 40% of hematocrit

WBC = 5,000 to 10,000

PLT = 150,000 to 300,000

Why do I need a "fingerstick" blood draw?

A fingerstick is a quick way to test a small amount of blood. To receive your chemotherapy, your white blood count needs to be a certain level (usually 4.0). If we suspect that your WBC will be too low, we'll do a fingerstick test before starting your treatment.

When will my lab results be ready?

Generally, the results of tests performed at our on-site lab are available soon after your blood is drawn. For example:

CBC - 15 to 20 minutes

General chemistry profile - 24 hours

Coagulation tests - 5 hours

Cancer markers or certain anemia-related tests - 1 to 5 days

Bone marrow examination - 7 to 14 days

If a test cannot be performed in our lab, it may take from 1 to 7 days or longer to receive the test results.

Can I call the lab for my test results?

No. You may call the nurse or ask your physician about your lab results during your scheduled office visit.

Can I have a cholesterol test?

Insurance companies sometimes restrict what testing may be covered. Our insurance staff can determine if the test is covered.

Can I have my results sent to another doctor?

Yes. We will gladly send copies of results to other physicians. Please provide us with their full names and addresses.