Welcome to Two-Minute Tuesday. I’m your nurse, Amy Hertog. Our topic today is demystifying cholesterol.

A cholesterol test is required as part of your annual biometric screening but what is cholesterol and why do your numbers matter?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is found in your cells. Your body needs some cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, and bile acids that help you digest foods.

The cholesterol you need is made by your liver.

However, cholesterol is also found in some foods.

Cholesterol can’t dissolve in blood, so proteins carry it where it needs to go. These carriers are called lipoproteins.

There’s good and bad cholesterol. HDL stands for High Density Lipoproteins and it’s the “good guy.” HDL is a clean-up crew as it cruises the bloodstream. Along the way it removes harmful bad cholesterol – also called Low Density Lipoproteins or LDL.

LDL is bad because having high levels of LDL can lead to plaque buildup in your arteries and result in heart attacks or strokes.

Total cholesterol is a measure of the cholesterol in your blood and includes good HDL, bad LDL, and triglycerides.

Triglycerides are a type of fat found in your blood that your body uses for energy. The combination of high levels of triglycerides with too much bad cholesterol or not enough good cholesterol can increase your risk for heart attack or stroke. So what can you do about it?

Important first steps include making healthy eating choices...

...and increasing exercise.

Quitting smoking is also important since smoking reduces the amount of HDL, or “good” cholesterol, in your blood.
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Cutting down on alcohol is helpful since it's high in calories and sugar and has a particularly potent effect on triglycerides. Even small amounts of alcohol can raise triglyceride levels.

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Cholesterol screening is important not only for adults. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute says all children and adolescents should have their cholesterol monitored at least once between the ages of 9 and 11, and again between the ages 17 and 21.

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So get your cholesterol checked and act on the results - for a healthier, happier you. And if you aren’t sure where to start, call me!

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Thanks for tuning in to Two-Minute Tuesday. To subscribe or watch previous episodes, visit us online.