



Lab tests are done on samples of body fluids or tissues to learn more about how your body is working. Many lab tests are done with a small sample of blood taken from a vein in your arm. Some tests are done on urine (pee), stool (poop), sputum (spit or phlegm), or a piece of a tumor. Other names you might hear used for lab tests include drawing blood, lab draws, or phlebotomy.

Before your appointment

You usually don't have to do anything to prepare for a blood test. Ask if you need to stop eating, drinking, or taking any medicines before your appointment.

Complete blood count (CBC)

One of the most common lab tests done is a complete blood count, or CBC. The CBC looks at your blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.

Basic or complete metabolic panel (BMP or CMP)

A chemistry panel tests certain substances in your blood to see how organs such as your liver and kidneys are working. It also measures electrolytes in your blood, like sodium, potassium, and calcium.

Hepatic panel

Liver function tests (LFTs) show how well your liver is working. Your liver helps remove toxins, breaks down medicines, and is involved in blood clotting. Some cancer treatments can damage the liver.

Coagulation panel

These are different tests to check how well your blood is clotting or your risk for bleeding. Many cancer treatments affect the blood and can cause problems with both bleeding and blood clots.

Words to know

Anemia: Low number of red blood cells (RBC) and low hemoglobin (HGB)

Culture: Test done on a body fluid or tissue to see if it grows bacteria or another type of germ

Nadir: The time where a person's blood counts are at their lowest after cancer treatment (usually chemo)

Negative: A lab test result that did not find the condition tested for (normal)

Neutropenia: Low number of neutrophils, the most common white blood cell (WBC)

Pancytopenia: Having low red blood cells (anemia), low neutrophils (neutropenia), and low platelets (thrombocytopenia) at the same time

Positive: A lab test result that did find the condition tested for (abnormal)

Thrombocytopenia: Low number of platelets (PLT)

Cultures

Cultures are lab tests on a body fluid (such as blood, urine, or stool) that check for bacteria or other germs. Since infections in people with cancer can get worse fast, treatment sometimes is started before the lab results come back.

What's normal?

The normal range for lab tests can be a little different from lab to lab. Your “normal” might also depend on the type of cancer and treatment you’re getting. The normal range for each test is usually included on your lab report, next to your test result.

Getting your lab test results

People in the United States must be given their test results as soon as they are complete. This means that you might see your test results before your doctor does.

If you see results that are confusing or abnormal, you might stress and worry. You could also learn about a new diagnosis without someone there to support you or answer your questions. Talking to the doctor who is ordering the tests ahead of time can help lower stress about getting the results.

Here are some things you might want to ask:

- What results the doctor expects
- Where and when you might get the results
- What a normal or abnormal result might mean for you
- When and how your doctor will contact you to talk about your results
- Who to call if you see results first and have concerns or questions



To learn more, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

