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**Calculating cholesterol a balancing act**

Non-elevated cholesterol levels are often considered an excuse to continue with unhealthy eating patterns, but measuring total cholesterol may not be an accurate reflection of what is really happening inside the body.

In the August edition of ePathWay, Associate Professor David Sullivan, Chemical Pathologist and Physician at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital explains that cholesterol is made up of good and bad components, and it's these elements and their levels that are important to determining overall health.

"There really is no normal cholesterol level," says Associate Professor Sullivan. "Different people have different requirements and risk factors, and a person's blood picture changes as obesity increases. In these circumstances, it's not so much a case of having a problem with bad cholesterol, but more a lack of good cholesterol and an increase in triglycerides in the blood."

This means that to get an accurate picture of what's really happening inside a person's arteries, pathologists need to measure the total cholesterol level as well as the level of triglycerides and good 'HDL' cholesterol in the blood. It's difficult to measure the bad 'LDL' cholesterol, so pathologists usually calculate this level based on the other factors.

"A key part of keeping cholesterol levels under control is to try to avoid unhealthy fats since they are the main culprits in artery disease," says Associate Professor Sullivan. "A good rule of thumb when looking at fat is that if it's solid at room temperature then it's probably an unhealthy fat, but if it's a liquid then it's a healthier choice."

The full article can be found in the [current edition](#) of ePathWay.

**Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia**

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**Media enquiries:**

Dr Debra Graves  
CEO – RCPA  
0417 218 528

or

Emma Hartley  
S2i Communications  
0450 533 431