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## Common Blood Tests

While there are hundreds of blood tests that can be performed in the laboratory to help health care professionals diagnose and treat a health problem, most are quite specialized and useful only in rare instances. The two exceptions to this rule are the complete blood count and the test for blood chemistries. Both of these laboratory blood tests are useful for a number of different conditions.

The Complete Blood Count (also known as the CBC) measures the number of blood cells in a given amount of blood and then compares this number to known, normal ranges. Depending on how your numbers compare to the normal ranges—either too low, too high, or right in the middle—your health care professional will be able to more accurately diagnose your health problem.

A CBC, for example, can help your health care professional determine whether you have anemia—a condition where there are too few red blood cells or too little hemoglobin—the red pigment that carries oxygen to the cells of the body. It can also help determine if you have an infection by measuring your white blood cells. Since the body produces more of these cells in order to fight infections—such as pneumonia—a very high count of white blood cells may indicate that an infection is present. A CBC can also help your health care professional assess the health of your bone marrow—as well as a host of other general health concerns—by measuring your platelet count. Platelets are bits of cells that are important in preventing bleeding. They may be thought of as tiny patches to seal small leaks in blood vessels.

The test for blood chemistries is another common laboratory test that measures a number of different blood components—such as the minerals sodium, potassium, and chloride, to name just a few. This useful blood test can help your health care professional determine whether you have a variety of different maladies by comparing the numbers of these blood components to their known normal ranges. Since many acute illnesses cause certain blood component levels to shift—again, with amounts being either too low or too high—the test for blood chemistries can rule out many causes and assist in an accurate diagnosis of the real problem. If, for example, the levels of creatinine and urea are too high, the possibility of kidney disease exists. If glucose levels are elevated, the possibility of diabetes exists.



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- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION