

One of the most important factors in determining the [accuracy and reliability](#) of your lab test is you, the patient. After all, it is a sample from your body (blood, urine, or some other specimen; see [Collecting Samples for Testing](#)) on which the test will be performed. Therefore, it is essential that you do the following to ensure that the results will be useful and interpreted correctly by your healthcare provider:

- Follow instructions to prepare for the specific test you are having performed.
- Alert the person collecting your sample if you have deviated from the instructions and how.
- Inform the healthcare practitioner of any medications (including vitamins and supplements) you are taking. If you are taking certain prescribed medications, such as [anticoagulants](#) (blood-thinners) or seizure medication, you may want to write down the exact time at which you took your dose and when your blood was drawn. This information will be useful if your healthcare provider has any questions about your test results.

Certain behaviors may affect some test results, such as recent or excessive exercise, not taking in enough fluids (dehydration), excessive eating, or recent sexual activity. You may be asked to refrain from some of these activities for certain tests.

One of the more common types of preparation required for testing is *fasting* (without all or certain foods) for several hours before the test or even overnight. Certain tests may require you to increase or decrease the *amount you drink* for 10 to 12 hours prior to the test. There may be specific *foods and medications* you will need to avoid. Or you may be asked not to *smoke* before the test or even not to drink your favorite herbal tea. If you are collecting the specimen at home (such as urine, stool, or semen), you could be asked to follow certain procedures to transport the sample from home to the lab.

Examples of some common laboratory tests that require advance preparation include:

- [Glucose tolerance, fasting, and two-hour post-prandial blood glucose tests](#): fasting or eating meals at specific times may be required.
- [Lipids profile \(triglycerides, cholesterol, etc.\)](#): typically fasting for 9-12.
- [Creatinine](#): fasting overnight or refraining from eating cooked meat may be required since some studies have shown that eating cooked meat prior to testing can temporarily increase the level of creatinine.
- [Fecal occult blood test](#): possible certain food and/or medication restrictions.
- [Urine culture](#): a patient may be instructed not to urinate for at least one hour before the test and/or to drink water 15-20 minutes before sample collection.
- [5-HIAA](#): foods such as avocados, bananas, pineapples, plums, walnuts, tomatoes, kiwi fruit, and eggplant can interfere with 5-HIAA measurement and should be avoided for 3 days prior to and during urine collection; there are also a variety of drugs that can affect the 5-HIAA test.
- [Cortisol](#): resting before sample collection may be required and, if a saliva sample is to be collected, it may be necessary to refrain from eating, drinking, or brushing teeth for a period of time prior to the test

Finally, with laboratory testing, like other aspects of medical care, it is crucial that you are open and honest with your healthcare provider. Just as you should give them your complete personal, medical, and family history, you may need to report deviations from preparation instructions and/or any medications that you are taking at the time of testing, including vitamins and supplements, as these may affect the results. You also may be asked about the amount of alcohol you consume, tobacco products you smoke, or any illicit drugs you may have recently taken. Providing complete, accurate information will help to ensure the reliability of your test results and prompt diagnosis and/or treatment.

Should I fast prior to lab work?

If your doctor orders lab work, ask if you should fast before having the lab work done. Fasting is needed for some lab tests because certain test values change following the digestion of food. The measurements of blood sugar (glucose) and some blood lipids (fats and cholesterol) are common examples.

If you are required to fast

Please read the following fasting instructions thoroughly. By following these instructions, you will help us to collect the most accurate specimen for the test your doctor has requested.

Fasting instructions

If you're asked to fast prior to lab work:

- Do not eat or drink anything (except water) during the eight hours prior to having your blood drawn or other specimen taken.
Note: If your physician has ordered lipid tests, you must fast for at least 12 hours. You may drink only water; no juice, tea, coffee, diet soda or other beverage.
- Do not smoke, chew gum or exercise. These activities may stimulate the digestive system and alter test results.
- Continue to take prescription medications unless your physician tells you otherwise. Check with your physician about over-the-counter medications. After your specimen is collected, you may resume your normal diet and activities.

Questions and Answers

Why do I have to fast?

- Some test values change following the digestion of food. For example, if you eat lots of sugar, your blood sugar will be high. When you are fasting, we get a base result that can be compared over time.

I'm thirsty. Can I have something to drink?

- You may drink only water. Do not drink juice, coffee, tea, diet soda or any other beverage regardless of whether or not it has cream and/or sugar in it.

I'm hungry. Can I eat anything?

- Sorry, you may not eat anything while fasting.

Should I continue to take my medications?

- Unless your physician tells you otherwise, continue to take your prescriptions. Ask your physician about over-the-counter medications.

May I chew gum?

- No, not even sugarless. Gum stimulates your digestive system and can alter the test results.

May I smoke?

- No, smoking can affect the test results.

May I do my exercise routine?

- No, exercise can affect test results.

What time should I come to the laboratory?

- Most people find it convenient to stop eating and drinking after 8 p.m. and to arrive at the laboratory early the next morning.