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Tests to determine if people at risk for heart disease

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Step right up and find out whether you're at risk for heart disease.

It sounds like a carnival pitch, but the free testing being offered Saturday at Costco in Lake Park and March 25 at Costco in Boca Raton is all about defeating the nation's No. 1 killer.

Anyone — Costco member or not — can receive a free evaluation of risk factors, including your family history for heart disease, your lifestyle, your weight and your past medical history.

If you are found to be at risk, based on these evaluations, you will be offered a new, painless and noninvasive test that measures the amount of cholesterol in the skin tissues.

Known as the PREVU skin sterol test, it "is a reliable predictor of higher cholesterol accumulation in the arteries and, accordingly, risk of heart disease," according to the companies involved in its production and distribution.

Clinical studies have shown that as cholesterol accumulates on artery walls it also accumulates in other tissues, including the skin.

A small study presented last year at the conference of the American College of Cardiology found that skin sterol testing could identify increased risk in patients who had no signs or symptoms of cardiovascular disease.

Other cholesterol tests require a skin prick and fasting. The PREVU test doesn't require any special dietary restrictions and no blood is taken.

"This doesn't replace the need for other tests, but as a screening tool. it's quick and noninvasive," says Dr. Peter Salgo, associate director of the Open Heart ICU at New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York, and author of *The Heart of the Matter*.

Salgo will be available at both Costco stores to discuss heart health.

"You're gonna get 14 pages (of health information) to take to your doctor, and it will also explain the science behind (the PREVU test)," Salgo said.

Not everyone will get the PREVU test because it is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use only in people with a history of heart attack or those suspected of having severe coronary artery disease.

The test promises to be unlike anything you've experienced before at a doctor's office.

According to Salgo, a small piece of foam rubber containing two holes is placed in your palm. Fluid is placed in each hole and the color is measured by a hand-held color reader.

The liquid will change color depending on the amount of sterol, a type of cholesterol, in the skin.

"We'll be keeping a database for people who want to track their numbers over time," Salgo added.

Free heart disease assessments will be available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday at the Costco at 3250 Northlake Blvd., Lake Park, and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 25 at the Boca Raton Costco at 17800 Congress Ave.