

# Triglycerides

## What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are a type of lipid (fat). Your body gets triglycerides from fats in the food you eat. When your body digests food, fats in the food change to triglycerides. Your liver also makes triglycerides. Your blood carries triglycerides to all parts of the body to be used as energy or stored as fat.

Triglycerides combine with protein in your blood to form substances called high-density and low-density lipoproteins. The lipoproteins contain cholesterol, which is one of the fats in blood that is related to heart disease.

It's good to have a triglyceride level lower than 150 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL). Triglycerides higher than this may increase your risk of health problems. For example:

- A high triglyceride level is one of the components of metabolic syndrome. Metabolic syndrome increases your risk for heart disease.
- A level above normal may be a risk factor for diabetes.
- Very high triglycerides may increase the risk for inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis).

## What causes high triglyceride levels?

High triglyceride levels may have several causes:

- Weight gain. Triglyceride levels usually increase as your weight increases.
- Too many calories in your diet, especially from sugar and alcohol. Alcohol increases your liver's production of triglycerides. It also reduces the amount of fat cleared from your blood.
- Age. Triglyceride levels go up as you get older.
- Medicines. Some drugs, such as birth control pills, steroids, and diuretics (water pills), can cause triglyceride levels to rise.
- Illness. Medical conditions associated with high triglyceride levels are diabetes, hypothyroidism, kidney disease, and liver disease.
- Heredity. Some forms of high triglycerides run in families.

## How are triglycerides measured?

Your healthcare provider can measure your triglyceride level with a simple blood test. You should not eat for 12 to 14 hours before the test. Your provider wants to know the amount of triglycerides being made by your liver rather than what is made from foods you have eaten.

## How are high levels treated and prevented?

Here are things you can do to lower your triglyceride level:

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Get regular exercise.
- Eat less sugar and sugar-containing foods and drinks, like soda.
- Eat several small meals and healthy snacks throughout the day instead of 2 or 3 large meals.
- Drink less alcohol.
- Get no more than 20 to 35% of your total calories from fat.
- Eat 2 or 3 meals of fish, such as salmon, tuna, or mackerel, each week. (Fish oil has been found to reduce triglycerides.)

If these lifestyle changes do not lower your triglyceride levels, your healthcare provider may prescribe a medicine. The medicine can decrease the liver's production of triglycerides and clear triglycerides from your blood. The medicine will help lower cholesterol and your risk for heart disease.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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