

What are Triglycerides?

Many people who are working hard to reduce their risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) are familiar with the terms of "[good cholesterol](#)" and "[bad cholesterol](#)". What is often overlooked or under discussed are triglyceride levels (TG).

What are triglycerides?

Like the other types of cholesterol, triglycerides are fats (lipids) that, in balanced and moderate amounts, perform significant and important functions in your body. Yet, when triglyceride levels are persistently too high, they may add to the build up of plaque in your arteries and could increase your risk of heart disease and pancreatitis.

Where do triglycerides come from?

Triglycerides come from fats consumed in food or created by your body from sources like carbohydrates. When you eat a meal, your food calories are either immediately used for energy or they are converted to triglycerides and stored in fat tissues. Your hormones regulate the release of triglycerides from your fat tissues and once released, your body uses your triglycerides as energy between meals.

What causes very high triglycerides?

There are many different causes of very high triglyceride levels.

Lifestyle issues:

- Being overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol

Medical conditions:

- Family history of high triglycerides
- Diabetes
- Underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism)

Medications:

- Estrogen therapy (for menopause)
- Thiazide diuretics (for hypertension)
- Beta blockers (for hypertension)

Triglyceride Guidelines

The National Cholesterol Education Program guidelines for triglycerides are:

Triglyceride Level Classifications*

Desirable:	Less than 150 mg/dL
Borderline-high:	150–199 mg/dL
High:	200–499 mg/dL
Very high:	500 mg/dL or higher

*Triglyceride levels are measured in milligrams (mg) per deciliter (dL) of blood.

Many people with high triglycerides have underlying diseases or genetic disorders. If this is true for you, the main therapy is to change your lifestyle. This includes controlling your weight, eating foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, exercising regularly, not smoking and, in some cases, drinking less alcohol.

As you work with your doctor, you will likely have a blood test to measure your triglyceride levels. The goal, as stated by the guidelines, is to have a triglyceride level less than 150 mg/dL.

Also, it is important to discuss how many carbohydrates you should eat on a daily basis with your doctor. The American Heart Association cautions individuals with very high triglycerides to limit their carbohydrate intake to 40%-50% of total calories because carbohydrates could raise your triglyceride levels even further.

Tips for Lowering Triglycerides

Patients trying to lower very high triglycerides should:

- Confirm with their doctor that there is not another underlying disease, genetic disorder, lifestyle issue or medication raising triglyceride levels. Very high triglycerides could be caused by:
 - Lifestyle issues:
 - Being overweight
 - Drinking too much alcohol
 - Medical conditions:
 - Family history of high triglycerides
 - Diabetes
 - Underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism)
 - Medications:
 - Estrogen therapy (for menopause)
 - Thiazide diuretics (for hypertension)
 - Beta blockers (for hypertension)

- Make lifestyle changes, such as:
 - Control weight. Start by reducing calories from all sources: fats, proteins, carbohydrates and alcohol – until you reach your ideal weight.
 - Eat wisely, selecting foods low in saturated fats and cholesterol
 - People with high triglycerides may need to substitute monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats — such as those found in canola oil, olive oil, or liquid margarine — for saturated fats.
 - Limit consumption of carbohydrates to no more than 40%-50% of total calories because carbohydrates raise triglycerides in some people
 - Exercise regularly. Select an exercise program or routine you can stick with. The goal should be to be physically active for 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
 - Quit smoking.
 - Significantly reduce alcohol consumption
- Follow the specific plans laid out by their doctor or healthcare professional.