

High Triglycerides? Here's what you can do



What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are a type of fat found in your body and in many of the foods that you eat. A high level of triglycerides in your blood (more than 150 milligrams per deciliter, mg/dL) may increase your risk of heart disease. This is especially true when you also have a high level of bad cholesterol (LDL) or a low level of good cholesterol (HDL). A high level of triglycerides in your blood may also increase your risk of developing pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas).

TRIGLYCERIDE GUIDELINES

- Normal is less than 150 mg/dL.
- Borderline high is 150-198 mg/dL.
- High is 200 mg/dL or above.

What causes high triglycerides?

High triglycerides can be caused by certain medical conditions (such as diabetes and pregnancy), some medications (such as estrogen, blood pressure pills containing thiazides, tamoxifen, and some HIV regimens), or it can simply run in your family. But the kind of daily choices you make also affects your triglycerides. If any of the following are true for you, you may be at greater risk of having high triglycerides:

- being overweight or obese
- not getting enough exercise
- taking in too many calories, especially from alcohol, fat, and foods high in sugar
- smoking

What can you do to lower your triglycerides?

- If you are overweight, try to lose weight. Losing as little as 10 pounds can help.
- Exercise regularly. Start with 10 minutes of daily activity, such as walking, bicycling, or swimming. Work up to at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days.
- Limit alcohol to 2 drinks a week.
- If your triglycerides are over 500, avoid alcohol.
- Limit sugars, including fat-free baked goods. Limit fruit juice to 4-8 oz. per day.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugars under good control.
- Eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet. Whole grain foods, fruits, and vegetables provide fiber. Use small amounts of monounsaturated fats such as olive or canola oil, avocado, and nuts.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, water-packed albacore tuna, and water-packed sardines are good choices. Fish provides omega-3 fatty acids, which may lower triglycerides.
- When triglyceride levels are very high, dietary supplements providing omega-3 DHA and EPA fatty acids may lower them. Talk with your doctor about supplements that may help you.
- If you smoke, quitting is one of the best choices you can make to improve your health. Call or visit your local Health Education Department to learn about all of the Kaiser Permanente programs available to help you quit.

High Triglycerides? Here's what you can do

Simple dietary changes can help lower triglycerides

To bring down your triglycerides, try replacing sweets and alcohol with these healthier substitutes.

Use less . . .	Use instead . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sugar-sweetened soft drinks, lemonade, and fruit drinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unsweetened fruit juice (limit to 4 to 8 oz. a day) fresh or unsweetened fruit (1 to 2 pieces a day) sugar-free or diet soft drinks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cake, pie, doughnuts, pastries, ice cream, ice milk, sherbet, sorbet, sugar-sweetened gelatin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sugar-free gelatin or pudding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cereals with more than 5 grams of sucrose and other sugars per ounce white breads, white rice, and pastas candy, chocolate, sugar, honey, jam, or jelly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole wheat pasta
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor, liqueurs, and cordials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sparkling water, mineral water, or club soda non-alcoholic sparkling fruit juice

What if these changes don't help you lower your triglycerides?

In some cases, your doctor may recommend more changes to your diet and lifestyle. Your doctor may suggest that you work with other medical professionals (such as a registered dietitian or clinical health educator). If diet and lifestyle changes don't improve your triglycerides, you may need to take medication.

Additional resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

Adapted from *Mayo Clinic Health Letter*, September 1990, with permission from the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Rochester, MN 55905.



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.