

Triglyceride is the scientific name for fat. Fat helps transport fat-soluble vitamins and provides essential fatty acids. It is found in your body and in the food you eat.

Fats, along with carbohydrates and protein, provide your body with calories. If you eat more calories than you need, your body makes triglyceride. Triglyceride is carried through the bloodstream and deposited as fat in body tissue.

Elevated triglyceride is a risk factor for coronary artery disease. This brochure is designed to give the information you need to understand triglyceride.

Triglyceride and your health

Individuals with high triglyceride often have other risk factors for heart disease such as high blood cholesterol, obesity and diabetes. To determine your risk for heart disease, your doctor will consider your level of triglyceride, along with your blood cholesterol, blood pressure, family history of heart disease, and whether you smoke or are overweight.

Pancreatitis, a painful inflammation of the pancreas, may occur in some individuals when triglyceride levels are over 500 mg/dl. If pancreatitis is a concern for you, your doctor will alert you to the signs and symptoms to watch for.

Causes of high triglyceride

The most common cause of mildly elevated triglyceride is obesity. As your weight increases, your triglyceride level rises proportionately. Age, gender and heredity may also be factors in elevated triglyceride levels. Very high triglyceride (>1000 mg/dl) is usually the result of a genetic problem involving how your body produces or breaks down fat. Excess alcohol and/or sugar may increase triglyceride in some individuals.

Diabetes mellitus, hypothyroidism and kidney disease may cause triglyceride levels

to be elevated. Oral contraceptives and estrogen as well as other medications can also raise triglyceride level.

Triglyceride is often elevated in individuals with metabolic syndrome. In this syndrome, individuals have a group of risk factors for heart disease. These factors include high blood pressure, abdominal obesity, high triglyceride, elevated HDL-cholesterol and high blood glucose.

Triglyceride classifications

Triglyceride levels vary widely depending upon food intake and activity level. Normal triglyceride levels vary according to gender and age. Blood samples for triglyceride testing are drawn after fasting for 12 hours and avoiding alcohol for 72 hours. The National Cholesterol Education Program has classified normal, borderline and high triglyceride levels in blood as follows.

Amount	Classification
Less than 150 mg/dl	Normal
150-199 mg/dl	Borderline to high
200-400 mg/dl	High
More than 499 mg/dl	Very high

A normal classification does not necessarily mean desirable. Your doctor may recommend a different triglyceride level after considering your medical history.

Treatment for lowering triglyceride

You may be able to lower the triglyceride in your blood by making changes in your diet and exercise habits. If lifestyle changes are not enough or if your triglyceride level is very high, your doctor may prescribe a medication.

Steps to lower triglyceride

Consider your body weight. Even a 5- to 10- pound weight loss can bring down triglyceride levels. Strive to maintain your weight if you are not overweight. Use the following guidelines to determine your calorie intake for weight loss or maintenance.

DAILY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALORIES AND FAT

	To Maintain Weight		To Lose Weight	
	Calories	Grams of Fat	Calories	Grams of Fat
Men	2100-2400	70-80	1500-1800	50-60
Women	1800-2100	60-70	1200-1500	40-50

Limit your fat intake to no more than 30 percent of your total daily calories.

Limiting your fat intake can help control calories. However, it is not necessary to eliminate all dietary fat. The above chart gives suggested limits for dietary fat. Read food labels when making food selections. Learn how to prepare lowfat foods.

Facts about Triglyceride

Become active. Regular activity is an important part of any weight loss program, but it is especially helpful in lowering triglyceride. If you are currently are not exercising, check with your doctor about starting a regular program. Aim for accumulating 30-60 minutes of aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, biking or lap swimming, 5-6 days a week.

Eat high-fiber vegetables, grains and legumes instead of concentrated sugar sources. In some individuals, excess calories from carbohydrates are converted to triglyceride. Use the following guidelines to control your carbohydrate intake.

Eat more of these foods:

- fresh or unsweetened fruits—up to three servings per day
- sugar-free gelatin or pudding
- popcorn, pretzels or lowfat chips for snacks
- legumes (beans, peas and lentils)
- whole grain cereals, yeast breads, crackers
- raw and cooked vegetables
- sparkling or mineral water, or club soda

Eat less of these foods:

- sugar-sweetened soft drinks, fruit juices (including unsweetened), and fruit drinks
- cakes, pies, doughnuts, pastries, ice cream, ice milk, sherbet and sugar-sweetened gelatin
- sugar-sweetened or coated cereals

- candy, chocolate, sugar, honey, jam or jelly
- white flour products such as white bread, bagels and pasta

Use alcohol wisely. In some individuals, alcohol speeds the production of triglyceride. It also is a source of excess calories. If you do drink, limit your intake to one or two drinks per day.

This brochure is based on guidelines developed by a team of health care experts at the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI), of which Park Nicollet Health Services is an active member. It will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as scientific evidence changes. This material is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.