



What You Should Know About Triglycerides

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body and are a major source of energy. Like cholesterol, triglycerides are produced by your body and are healthy at certain levels. Elevated triglycerides are a more significant risk factor of heart disease for women than for men.

The connection between triglycerides and heart disease

High levels of triglycerides have been shown to lend to heart disease in the following ways:

- High triglyceride levels increase the “stickiness” of red blood cells, a predictor of cardiovascular disease.
- Many people who have high triglyceride levels also have high total and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels and low HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels. Having high triglyceride levels and low HDL levels can be especially dangerous for women.
- High triglyceride levels are also associated with diabetes and being overweight, two serious risk factors for heart disease.

But isn't heart disease a man's disease?

No! Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women as well as for men. Twice as many women die each year from cardiovascular disease as from all forms of cancer combined.

Be aware that some risk factors for heart disease differ between men and women. Triglyceride levels are one of these risk factors. Elevated triglyceride levels pose a greater heart disease risk for women than men. Levels higher than 190 mg/dL significantly increase a woman's cardiovascular disease risk, while men don't see the same increased risk until triglycerides reach 400 mg/dL. That's why it's especially important for women to know and manage their triglyceride levels to stay healthy. Women should try to maintain a triglyceride level of 150 mg/dL or less.



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Could I have elevated triglyceride levels?

After age 20, total cholesterol and triglyceride levels naturally begin to rise. All women over 20 years of age should have their total blood cholesterol level checked by their doctors at least once every five years.

Total and HDL ("good") cholesterol levels are usually measured first. Even if your cholesterol results are at a healthy level (total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL and HDL cholesterol of 40 mg/dL or higher), you may have elevated triglyceride levels. If you would like to find out your exact level, you should ask your physician for a complete blood lipid profile test. The results of this test will tell you what your triglyceride and LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels are. You will have to fast for up to 12 hours before this test.

Or, you could take a Women's HeartAdvantage cardiovascular risk assessment, which will give you triglyceride levels.

What can I do to lower my triglyceride level?

Your triglyceride and cholesterol levels are determined by a number of factors, many of which you can control by making healthy lifestyle choices.

- Decrease the amount of saturated fat in your diet by limiting animal fats like butter, lard, and fat from meats and some plant fats like coconut and palm oil.
- Limit sugary foods and drinks.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Add 30 minutes of physical activity to your day by exercising regularly or with everyday activities like raking leaves or taking a brisk walk.

You might also want to speak to your doctor to determine if medications are a good choice for you. There are medications available aimed at lowering LDL cholesterol, raising HDL cholesterol, lowering triglycerides, and reducing other risk factors for heart disease.

Take care. Take charge. Take *heart*.

Heart disease is the #1 killer of women. It is a greater threat than all cancers combined. Since 1984, more women than men have died each year of heart disease.

Silver Cross Hospital's Women's HeartAdvantage Program is committed to helping women with heart disease. But while there is much a hospital, its physicians and nurses can do, we can make an even greater difference together with you. Take care of yourselves. Know what your risk is. Know what your heart health indicators are. And then take charge. Choose to quit smoking, to eat better, to exercise more, and to improve your health. Because women of America, this is your life. We hope you'll put your heart into it.

For more information on the Silver Cross Hospital Women's HeartAdvantage Program, call 1-888-660-HEAL (4325) or go to www.silvercross.org.



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