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High Triglycerides

What your number means, what drives it up and how to bring it down, usually starting with changes you can make yourself.

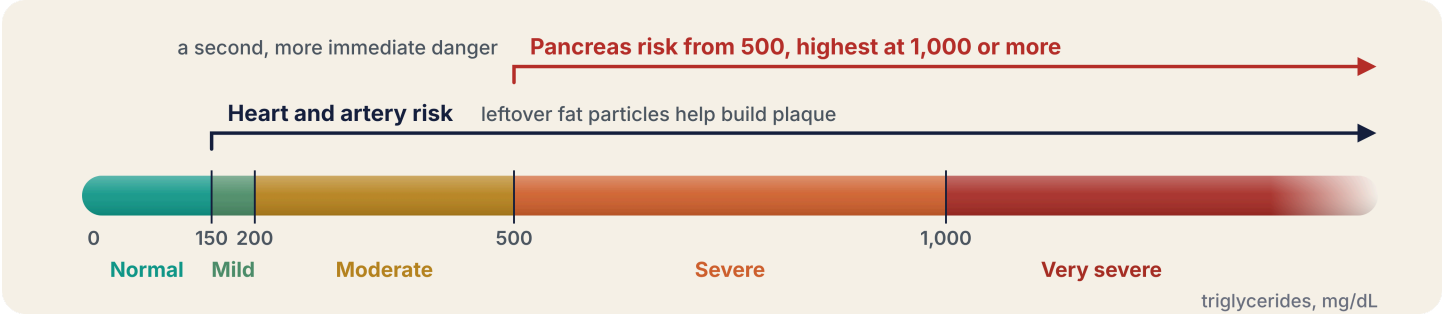
150
mg/dL or higher on a fasting test counts as high triglycerides

175
is the cutoff when blood is drawn without fasting, since a meal raises it

5 to 10%
of your body weight lost helps bring triglycerides down

WHAT YOUR NUMBER MEANS

One lab value, two different worries



Triglycerides are the fat your body carries in your blood for fuel. In the lower ranges, high triglycerides are a heart-and-artery problem. They travel with cholesterol-rich leftover particles, called remnants, that slip into artery walls and help build plaque. From 500 up, and especially at 1,000 or more, fat can flood the blood faster than the body can clear it, and that can inflame the pancreas. This inflammation, acute pancreatitis, is a medical emergency that can be life-threatening. Above 1,000 the risk is about 5% a year, and above 2,000 up to 20%.

WHAT DRIVES IT UP

Everyday habits stacked on your genes

Weight and blood sugar
Extra weight around the middle, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes push the liver to make more triglyceride-rich particles and slow the enzyme that clears them.

Sugar, refined carbs and alcohol
Your liver turns soda, sweets and white bread straight into triglycerides. Alcohol does the same, and in some people even a moderate amount sends the number soaring.

Conditions, medicines and genes
An underactive thyroid, kidney disease that spills protein and some common medicines raise it. Many people also inherit a tendency.

High triglycerides cause no symptoms until they get extreme, so many people have them without knowing.

Know which problem it is

A level of 250 gets a measured, long-game plan aimed at your heart. A level of 1,500 gets an urgent, aggressive plan aimed at your pancreas. Same lab, very different response.

BRINGING IT DOWN

Habits first, then medicine matched to the risk

FIRST MOVES FOR EVERYONE

habits do the heavy lifting

Lose a little weight	Losing even five to ten percent of your body weight helps.
Cut sugar and refined carbs	Trade soda and sweets for water and whole foods.
Pull back on alcohol	Cut back, or stop entirely for a stretch, and the follow-up lab will show how much it was contributing.
Get moving	Regular activity that gets you a little winded most days lowers triglycerides directly.
Add omega-3s	Oily fish like salmon and sardines, or a supplement, bring the number down.

WHEN THE CONCERN IS YOUR HEART

mild to moderate levels

Non-HDL cholesterol	When triglycerides are high, the usual LDL number can read falsely low. Non-HDL cholesterol, your total cholesterol minus your HDL, counts every plaque-building particle and predicts heart risk better.
A statin	If your ten-year risk of a heart attack or stroke is high enough, a statin is the foundation. It lowers the harmful LDL and remnant particles and has the strongest evidence of any lipid drug for preventing heart attacks.
Icosapent ethyl (Vascepa)	A purified, prescription omega-3, different from over-the-counter fish oil. It's considered when triglycerides stay in the 150 to 499 range on the best tolerated statin dose, along with other risk factors. In the REDUCE-IT trial, treating about 111 people for five years prevented one cardiovascular death.

WHEN THE CONCERN IS YOUR PANCREAS

500 to 999, and especially 1,000 and above

Go to the ER	Severe, constant upper belly pain, often spreading to the back, especially with vomiting.
A stricter diet	Fat cut sharply, to something like ten to fifteen percent of daily calories, refined carbs dropped and no alcohol. A dietitian often helps.
Fenofibrate	Fibrates such as fenofibrate are the most effective drugs for pulling triglycerides down, and a lower number reduces the risk of a pancreatitis attack. Prescription omega-3 at a full dose does similar work.
In the hospital	For pancreatitis that isn't settling, an insulin drip and occasionally plasmapheresis, which filters the fat out of the blood.

FASTING, FAMILY AND OTHER MEDICINES

Fasting gives the cleanest reading, and a high non-fasting result is usually confirmed with a fasting test. If your level is very high, or high from a young age, your relatives should be tested. If you have diabetes or extra weight, better blood sugar control and GLP-1 medicines such as semaglutide often lower triglycerides too.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

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hypertriglyceridemia

For education only, and not a substitute for advice from your own physician. Sources include the 2026 ACC/AHA dyslipidemia guideline, the 2026 AHA/ACC/ADA/ASN cardiovascular-kidney-metabolic guideline, the REDUCE-IT trial (NEJM 2019), the 2011 AHA statement on triglycerides and reviews in JCEM, AFP, BMJ and JACC.

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