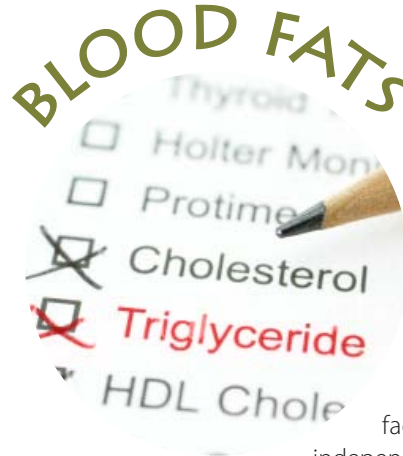


**Q.** My doctor said I have normal cholesterol levels (less than 200 mg/dL) but high triglycerides (309 mg/dL). Does that make sense?

**A.** Yes it does. **Cholesterol** is a fatty substance found in the blood. It can be made by most cells in the body (primarily the gut and the liver) or it can come from eating meat, eggs, and dairy (there is no cholesterol in plant foods). Cholesterol is carried in the blood primarily in fat/protein complexes called low density lipoproteins (LDL). How much cholesterol is in the blood is determined by genetics and how much saturated fat a person eats – the higher the saturated fat intake the higher the blood cholesterol level. If LDL cholesterol levels get above 130 mg/dL it is considered elevated and a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Ideally, it should be less than 100 mg/dL for optimum health.

**Triglyceride** is a fancy name for blood fat. The fats we eat are absorbed and then are carried in the blood primarily in fat/protein complexes called very low density lipoproteins (VLDL). How much fat or triglyceride there is in the blood is determined by genetics and lifestyle factors. Factors that raise blood triglyceride levels include: excess body weight, sugar intake (especially a combination of sweets and saturated fat), and alcoholic beverages. Getting regular physical activity (brisk walking, etc.) is one of the best ways to lower high triglyceride levels. How much fat you eat, strangely, has little effect on blood triglyceride levels.



Healthy triglyceride levels are less than 100 mg/dL. Levels of 150 mg/dL or higher are considered high and increase the risk for heart disease, especially in women. In the Framingham heart study, having high triglycerides was a better indicator of who would develop a heart attack than even blood cholesterol levels in women.

Both fats are important to your health but they are different fats, and different factors cause them to be elevated. They are also independent risk factors for disease.

- ✓ They can both be in a healthy range, or
- ✓ Either one can be elevated and the other one normal, or
- ✓ Both can be elevated.

The one factor that seems to raise both is excess body weight, but even this is not always the case. If either is high, follow the guidelines above to lower risk. Medications can also help if diet and exercise is not adequate to lower high risk levels. Ask your doctor for specific guidance.

