

# Blood Lipids

## What are blood lipids?

Lipids are fatty substances in the blood. The blood lipids include cholesterol and triglycerides. Lipids carry some vitamins and are a source of energy. Some lipids come from the foods we eat. Some are made by the body itself.

## Why are high blood lipids important?

High levels of blood lipids increase the risk of having heart disease and stroke. Several other factors also increase your risk for heart disease:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- a history of heart disease in close family members
- obesity
- being older.

If you are at risk for heart disease, have your blood lipid levels measured. Lowering blood lipid levels has been shown to lower the risk of heart disease.

## How can I lower my blood lipids if they are too high?

Diet can help to lower your blood lipid levels. Most of the lipids in your blood are made by your liver from the fats, carbohydrates, and proteins you eat. Eating the right amounts of carbohydrates, fat, and proteins helps your body keep normal blood lipid levels.

Your doctor can help you learn what to eat and what to avoid eating. In general, you should eat foods low in cholesterol and lower your total fat intake. Reducing fat, cholesterol, and calories in your diet can often lower blood lipid levels.

If you already have heart disease or are at high risk for developing it, you should follow a low saturated fat, low cholesterol diet. This decreases your chance of developing heart disease, future heart attacks, and other heart problems. High levels of cholesterol are found in eggs, dairy products, and red meats.

To follow this diet, you should eat:

- Less than 7% of the day's total calories from saturated fat
- 25 to 35% of the day's total calories from fat
- As little trans fat (hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils) as possible

- Less than 200 mg of cholesterol a day
- Just enough calories to achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

Some kinds of blood lipids, like triglycerides, are increased by drinking alcohol. People who have a problem with high triglycerides may also need to lower the amount of starch and sugar they eat as well.

If your lipid levels are not lowered enough by eating the right foods, your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine. Among the common drugs used are ezetimibe, niacin, gemfibrozil, atorvastatin, fluvastatin, lovastatin, pravastatin, and simvastatin. Each has slightly different effects on the various blood lipids and different side effects. Your doctor will choose the best one for you.

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