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Symptoms of Lipid Disorders

by Debra Wood, RN

[En Español](#)

Lipid disorders usually do not cause symptoms.

In extreme cases, the following signs or symptoms may be found by history or physical exam:

- Fatty deposits in the skin or tendons caused by very high levels of lipids in the blood
- Pain, enlargement, or swelling (inflammation) of abdominal organs such as the liver, spleen, or pancreas due to extremely high levels of triglycerides in the blood
- Changes in the blood vessels of the eye, caused by elevated lipids

Diagnosis of Lipid Disorders

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Lipid disorders are diagnosed with blood tests that measure the level of cholesterol and triglyceride in the blood.

Blood Tests

Cholesterol levels are checked with a blood test. A small blood sample is taken from a vein in your arm. You may need to fast for several hours, usually overnight, before your blood is taken.

The test measures levels of:

- Total cholesterol
- LDL (bad) cholesterol
- HDL (good) cholesterol
- Triglycerides

The readings are interpreted as follows:

Total Cholesterol

Level	Interpretation
<200 mg/dL (5.2 mmol/L)	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL (5.2-6.1 mmol/L)	Borderline high

240 mg/dL (6.2 mmol/L) and above	High
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LDL Cholesterol

Level	Interpretation
less than 100 mg/dL (2.6 mmol/L)	Optimal
100-129 mg/dL (2.6-3.3 mmol/L)	Near optimal/above optimal
130-159 mg/dL (3.4-4.0 mmol/L)	Borderline high
160-189 mg/dL (4.1-4.8 mmol/L)	High
>190 mg/dL (4.9 mmol/L) and above	Very high

HDL Cholesterol

Level	Interpretation
60 mg/dL (1.6 mmol/L) and above	Protective against heart disease
less than 40 mg/dL (1.0 mmol/L)	A major heart disease risk factor

Triglycerides

Level	Interpretation
less than 150 mg/dL (1.7 mmol/L)	Normal
150-199 mg/dL (1.7-2.2 mmol/L)	Borderline high
200-499 mg/dL (2.3-5.6 mmol/L)	High
500 mg/dL (5.7 mmol/L) and above	Very high

mg/dL = milligrams per deciliter of blood (

Treatments for Lipid Disorders

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The treatment and management of lipid disorders involves lifestyle changes (weight loss, exercise, and diet) and, when necessary, medication. The primary goal is usually to lower LDL cholesterol levels. The target level will depend on your overall risk for heart disease. Treatment also may include reducing triglyceride levels or raising HDL ("good") cholesterol levels.

Treatment involves the following:

[Lifestyle changes](#)

[Medications](#)

[Alternative and complementary therapies](#)

Currently, there are no surgical options for the treatment of lipid disorders. High doses of omega-3 fatty acids (fish or fish oil supplements) may lower triglyceride levels. For very high levels of LDL cholesterol that do not respond to lifestyle changes and medications, apheresis (plasmapheresis or plasma exchange) may be used to lower the LDL cholesterol levels.