

FOR YOUR PATIENTS

# Triglycerides—What's Your Number ?

## What are triglycerides?

- Triglycerides are a form of fat that circulates in your blood. Triglycerides are used as an energy source by your body.
- After eating, any calories that are not used immediately get stored as triglycerides inside fat cells.
- Although your body needs some triglycerides, too much may lead to heart disease, stroke, or pancreatitis.

## Causes of elevated triglycerides:

- Diet high in fat, certain carbohydrates, or sugar
- Too much alcohol
- Not enough exercise
- Being overweight
- Certain medical conditions (e.g. high blood sugar)
- Certain medications
- Heredity

## Triglyceride levels:

- Your clinician will check your triglyceride level with the same blood test used to measure cholesterol.
- Recent food intake can increase triglycerides, so it is important to fast for 8-12 hours before your blood test. You may drink water or coffee (with nothing in it) during the time you are fasting
- Compare your triglyceride level to the following categories:
  - Normal: less than 150 mg/dL
  - Borderline High: 150-199 mg/dL
  - High: 200-499 mg/dL
  - Very High: 500 mg/dL or more
- If your triglycerides are 500 mg/dL or more, you are at risk for pancreatitis. Pancreatitis can cause many other health problems and may be life-threatening. If your triglycerides are very high, your clinician will talk to you about making aggressive lifestyle changes and possibly taking medication to lower your triglycerides.

## Ways to lower triglycerides:

- **Diet**
  - **Cut back on fat.** Eliminate the trans fats and decrease the amount of saturated fats that you eat. Eat less processed foods, fast food, fried foods, beef, pork, whole milk, and ice cream.
  - **Increase fiber intake.** Fiber makes you feel full longer, so you may eat less. Most green, yellow, and orange vegetables; brown rice; whole grains, like oatmeal, are high in fiber.
  - **Eat healthier calories.** Only eat small portions of "starchy" foods (ex. pasta, rice, potatoes, corn, peas). Eat more vegetables than fruit. Limit fruit and fruit juice; these have natural sugar. Decrease sweets.
  - **Increase omega-3 intake.** Certain fish, like salmon and tuna, have good amounts of omega-3.
  - **Read nutrition labels.** This can help you determine the right portion size and keep track of your daily intake of calories, fats, and sugars.
  - **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day and women no more than 1 drink per day.
- **Exercise**
  - **Exercise at least 30 minutes, 5 times a week.** People with diabetes should exercise at least every other day. This can be done with many fun activities such as walking your dog, biking, playing a sport, going to the gym, swimming, dancing, or even taking the stairs at work.
- **Weight loss**
  - Lose weight by eating a healthy diet and doing regular exercise. Losing 5-10% of your body weight can lower triglycerides about 20%. Do not take supplements to lose weight unless your clinician tells you it is safe to do it.
- **Medications**
  - In addition to healthy lifestyle changes, your clinician may recommend that you take prescription medication and/or fish oil supplements to lower your triglyceride levels.
  - For best results, it is important to take your medication as prescribed. Talk to your clinician, if you have any questions or concerns about your medications.
- **Diabetes**
  - If your blood sugar is high, your triglycerides may also be high. Take your diabetes medication as prescribed. Test your blood sugar as recommended. Stay on schedule for your follow-up appointments for diabetes.



### References:

Miller M, Stone NJ, Ballantyne C, et al. Triglycerides and Cardiovascular Disease: A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 011; 123: 2292-2333.

This information is intended for providers and patients.

Health Care Providers—access this tear sheet at [www.learnyourlipids.com](http://www.learnyourlipids.com)

