

# TRIGLYCERIDES: What you need to know

## High triglycerides may increase your risk for heart disease

Triglycerides (mg/dL)	Level
Less than 150	Normal
150–199	Borderline high
200–499	High
500 or greater	Very high

## Healthy eating

Healthy food choices can help lower your triglycerides. Cut down on calories, portion sizes and added sugars, especially if you are overweight. Be careful when eating out, as calories and portion sizes are often different from at home.

### Vegetables & fruits

- Eat at least 4-6 servings of vegetables and whole fruits every day: broccoli, spinach, kale, green beans, apples, bananas, pears, oranges and berries.
- Choose fresh or frozen with “no added sugars.”
- If you drink fruit juice, limit to ½ cup each day.

#### Examples of one serving:

- 1 medium apple
- 1 cup raw or ½ cup steamed vegetables

### Choose “good” fats

- Choose olive, canola or peanut oil, almonds, cashews, pecans, walnuts and peanuts, peanut butter, flaxseed and avocado.
- At least 2 times per week, choose fatty fish like salmon, trout, albacore tuna or mackerel.
- Remember that even “good” unsaturated fats are high in calories, so keep your portion sizes small.
- If you have very high triglycerides, you may need to keep your total fat intake very low. Talk with your nurse or doctor if you have questions about how much fat is okay for you.

## What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides (TG) are fats found in the blood. **Lower is better.**

## What increases triglycerides?

- Smoking
- Unhealthy eating
- Inactive lifestyle
- Overweight/obesity
- High blood sugar/ diabetes
- Certain illnesses
- Family history
- Some medications



### Whole grains & high-fiber

- Eat 3 servings of fiber-rich whole grains each day: whole wheat bread, whole grain barley, bulgur, farro, quinoa, brown rice, wild rice and oatmeal.
- Limit simple carbohydrates: white bread, white rice and pasta.
- Beans are another healthy high-fiber choice.

#### Examples of one serving:

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ cup cooked rice, pasta or cereal

### Limit sweets & added sugars

- Choose water, low-fat or skim milk.
- Limit non-diet soft drinks or sodas, flavored juice drinks, sports drinks, sweetened tea and energy drinks.
- Limit sweets: candy, jam, jelly, sweetened yogurt, and baked goods such as cookies, pies and pastries.

#### Examples of one serving:

- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 Tbsp. jam or jelly

### Limit “bad” fats

- Try to limit your saturated fats to 10-16 grams per day.
- Avoid coconut oil, palm oil and hydrogenated fat.
- Limit fatty meats like hamburgers, hot dogs, salami, sausage, and whole milk, butter, ice cream and cheese.
- Avoid trans fats, found in stick margarines, snack foods, some baked goods and fast foods.

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## Activity level, weight & lifestyle changes

### Exercise and activity

Regular exercise at moderate to high levels helps to lower triglycerides.

Aim for 30-60 minutes of activity each day. Exercise for at least 10 minutes at a time. Consider using an activity tracker or pedometer to measure how much you move. Gradually increase your activity level towards a goal of 10,000 steps each day.

*Examples of moderate- to high-level exercise:*

- Brisk walking (3-4 mph)
- Swimming continuous laps
- Bicycling (8-10 mph)
- Singles tennis
- Basketball
- Dancing, Zumba®, kickboxing
- Raking leaves
- Lawn mowing with a push mower
- Housework—heavy cleaning



## Medications used to lower triglycerides

Your nurse or doctor may recommend one or more medications or dietary supplements to help lower your elevated triglycerides. Be sure to take these as directed. Talk with your healthcare provider if you think you are having side effects.

Be sure your nurse or doctor is aware of all prescriptions, dietary supplements and over-the-counter medications you take. Dietary supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the same way as medications.

### Omega-3 fatty acids

- By prescription or dietary supplement. *The prescription and supplement are not the same. Only take a supplement approved by your nurse or doctor.*
- May cause upset stomach, increased gas or a fishy taste.

### Fibrates

- By prescription: fenofibrate, gemfibrozil.
- Be certain to report any new or unexplained general muscle aches or weakness.

### Weight

Extra weight can lead to high triglycerides. Losing 5-10 percent of your body weight may lower your triglycerides by 20 percent. Eating less and moving more will help you lose weight. To lose one pound per week, eat 200 fewer calories each day and increase your activity by 300 calories every day. Using a smaller plate can help you eat fewer calories.

### Alcohol

If you choose to drink, limit to no more than 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men. Alcohol can raise triglycerides. If you have high triglycerides, you may be asked to limit or avoid alcohol completely.

*Examples of one drink:*

- 5 ounces of wine
- 12 ounces of beer
- 1½ ounces of alcohol

### Smoking

Smoking can also raise your triglycerides, lower “good” cholesterol, and is a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke. If you smoke, you should stop. Ask your nurse or doctor for resources to help you quit, and visit [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov).



### Niacin

- By prescription or dietary supplement. *The prescription and supplement are not the same. Only take a supplement approved by your nurse or doctor.*
- Niacin may have some side effects such as itching and flushing.

### Statins

- By prescription: atorvastatin, fluvastatin, lovastatin, pitavastatin, pravastatin, rosuvastatin and simvastatin.
- Lowers “bad” cholesterol, reduces risk of heart attack or stroke, may lower triglycerides.
- Be sure to report any new or unexplained general muscle aches or weakness.

*Supported by an independent educational grant from AstraZeneca.*

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