

Eating to Lower Triglycerides

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are a type of fat. They enter your blood when:

- extra calories that you eat are not used for energy.
- you eat excess fat in your diet.
- they are released from the fat already stored in your body.

High levels of triglycerides in your blood can increase the chance that you develop heart disease. Triglycerides do not build up in the arteries like bad cholesterol (LDL). Instead, high levels can make LDL cholesterol change into a more harmful form that damages the arteries. High triglycerides also keep you from forming good cholesterol (HDL). If triglycerides are very high, a dangerous condition called “pancreatitis” (inflammation in the pancreas), can develop.

Triglycerides	Optimal Triglycerides
Should be less than 150 mg/dl or less	100 mg/dl or less

High levels may be caused by:

- Being overweight,
- Eating too many high carbohydrate foods and drinks such as sugary drinks, sweets, grains and fruit,
- Eating too much unhealthy (saturated) fat,
- Drinking alcohol daily,
- Having diabetes or kidney disease,
- Genetics,
- Some medicines.

Ways to Lower Triglyceride Levels

1. **Achieve a healthier weight.** The fat stored in your body serves as a source of triglycerides. The less body fat you have, the less that will be released into the blood. Triglycerides will be reduced with a weight loss of 10-15 pounds.
2. **Limit foods high in sugar.** Some of the sugar you eat becomes triglycerides in your body. Regular soda, sweetened drinks (Kool-Aid®, lemonade, sweetened coffee drinks, Hi-C®, some sports drinks, some flavored waters), and fruit juice (even if unsweetened) are a major source of sugar. **Limit drinks that contain sugar to less than 6 ounces per day.**

Small amounts (3-6 teaspoons) of table sugar, syrup, or jelly will most likely not affect triglycerides, unless they are used more than once or twice per day. If you eat desserts, like cake or cookies, limit to one serving per day to reduce sugar and excess energy in your diet. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 6 tsp. a day of added sugar for women and no more than 9 tsp. for men.

Fruit contains natural sugars; but, even these sugars can raise your triglyceride levels. Whole fruit is a better choice than juice because it is high in fiber. Include 2-4 servings of fruit per day.

Examples of one serving of fruit:

- 1 cup fresh fruit (melon, berries, etc.)
- 1 small piece of fresh fruit (apple, orange, peach, pear, etc.)
- ½ cup canned fruit, unsweetened or in its own juice
- ¼ cup dried fruit

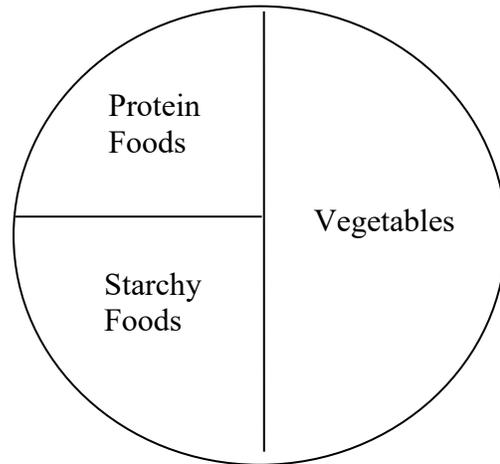
3. **Choose small portions of starchy foods (grains and starchy vegetables).** Starchy foods like bread, potatoes, pasta, cereal, rice, and noodles are broken down into sugars by your body. These sugars can become triglycerides if eaten in large amounts. Aim for 2-4 servings per meal.

Examples of One Serving of Grains or Starchy Vegetables

- 1 slice (1 ounce) of bread, white, whole wheat, or rye
- ½ of a hamburger or hot dog bun, English muffin, or bagel
- 1 four-inch pancake or waffle
- 1 six-inch tortilla, flour or corn
- 1/3 cup of cooked rice, white or brown, quinoa, bulgur or couscous
- ½ cup of cooked pasta or noodles (white or whole wheat)
- 1/3 cup baked beans
- ½ cup of white potato, sweet potato, peas, parsnips, or corn
- ¾ cup unsweetened corn flakes or ½ cup sweetened cornflakes
- ½ cup shredded wheat or ¼ cup granola
- ½ cup cooked oatmeal

- 3 cups popped popcorn or 10-12 tortilla chips
- 6 soda crackers

4. Make Your Plate Look Like This



Aim for ¼ lean protein, or protein low in saturated fat, and only ¼ with starchy foods. Fill the rest of your plate with vegetables. Most vegetables are low in carbohydrates and calories, and high in fiber. Besides being a very good source of vitamins, minerals, and other healthy nutrients, vegetables fill up your stomach and your plate.

5. **Include healthy fat in your diet.** Healthy (unsaturated) fats can help to manage hunger. If you limit your fat intake too much you will be hungry for more carbohydrate foods, which could increase blood triglycerides. Enjoy olive oil, olives, nuts, seeds or avocados daily, but keep servings small.

To eat less saturated fat (the unhealthy fat), limit the amount of fatty meats, high-fat dairy products (cheese, ice cream, butter), and high-fat desserts that you eat.

Some reduced-fat or fat-free products (like salad dressings, mayonnaise, peanut butter) may have more sugar, salt and calories than the regular product. Read labels with care.

Use alcohol in small amounts or not at all. Alcohol provides extra calories that make weight loss harder. It encourages the body to make more triglycerides. Besides raising triglycerides, it also increases blood pressure.

- 6. Exercise.** Exercise helps the muscles to use triglycerides for energy. The more you exercise, the more your triglyceride levels will drop. And, exercise can increase your good HDL (good) cholesterol. Exercise can lower triglycerides even without weight loss. Aim for at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate exercise per week.

- 7. Include protein foods in your meals.** Meals that contain some protein, along with carbohydrates and a little fat, are often more satisfying. These meals can provide longer-lasting energy than meals that contain little or no protein. Good sources of protein include:

- Low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, or cheese
- Lean ham, pork tenderloin, round or sirloin steak
- Baked, boiled, or grilled fish
- Tuna packed in water
- Eggs (up to 4 yolks/week, unlimited egg whites)
- Imitation crab
- Soy milk or soy protein powder
- Tofu
- Veggie burgers
- Nuts, seeds or nut/seed butters
- Herring or sardines
- Hummus (garbanzo bean spread)

Compare These Two Breakfast Examples

Meal #1	Meal #2 (Better Choice)
2 slices white toast with jelly Coffee or juice	1 slice whole wheat toast with peanut butter Apple Skim milk

These meals have the same number of calories, but, Meal #1 is nearly all carbohydrates. It provides quick energy but won't keep you full for long. Meal #2 (the better choice) includes protein, more fiber and healthy fat. Your body will digest and use this meal more slowly, giving you

energy for a longer time. When energy from food is released slowly into the bloodstream, the body is less likely to produce excess triglycerides. Include fiber, protein and healthy fat in your meals and snacks to help control your hunger. This may help you eat smaller meals and avoid high calorie snacks.

Sample 1-Day Menu	
Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup egg substitute or 2 egg whites • 1 slice whole wheat bread with 1 Tbsp. peanut butter • ½ grapefruit/1 navel orange/1 apple • 1 cup brewed coffee
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cups salad with 3-4 oz grilled chicken or chicken breast (Can add ~1/4 cup chick peas & ¼ cup avocados if desired) • 2 Tbsps. vinaigrette dressing • 5 whole grain crackers • 8 ounces sugar free lemonade
Afternoon Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 oz. of plain low-fat or fat-free yogurt • ¼ cup berries
Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 oz. baked/broiled salmon w/ 2 tsp olive oil and 1/8 cup slivered almonds • ½ cup brown rice & 1 whole wheat roll OR • 1 cup brown rice • 1 cup stir fry vegetables w/ 1 tsp olive oil
Bedtime Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit with 1 low-fat string cheese • 3 cups popcorn (3 cups, unsalted and without butter)

Summary

High blood triglycerides may increase your risk for heart disease. However, a change in eating and exercise habits can quickly improve triglyceride levels. If your triglyceride levels are high, start by cutting out the extra sugar in your diet.

Work toward slow weight loss (about 1 pound per week) through exercise and smaller servings of food at meals or snacks. Sometimes medicines that lower triglycerides are also needed. Eating and exercise changes will help these medicines work better.

Teach Back

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please call UW Health at one of the phone numbers below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at **(608) 287-2770**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#361