

Nutrition

FACT SHEET

TRIGLYCERIDES

What are triglycerides? Fat and oil in foods like butter, margarine, corn and canola oil are mainly in triglyceride form. The stored fat in body tissue is in triglyceride form, too. Most of the fat that the average American eats every day are triglycerides. Once eaten, triglycerides are processed in the liver in several ways:

- If you eat too much saturated fat, the liver produces more cholesterol and releases it into the blood stream.
- If you eat too many calories, the liver makes them into triglycerides and your body stores it as fat.
- If you drink alcohol, the liver produces more triglycerides that circulate in the blood.

Is a high triglyceride level a health problem?

High blood triglycerides, along with other risk factors, may increase your chance of developing heart disease. Risk factors which must be evaluated by your physician include high blood triglycerides, high blood

cholesterol, family history, smoking, high blood pressure, and obesity.

When are triglycerides measured?

A physician may check triglyceride levels when total blood cholesterol is measured, especially for individuals with one or more of the following:

- high total cholesterol
- two or more risk factors for heart disease, such as smoking and obesity
- health problems related to high triglycerides such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, chronic kidney disease and circulatory disease

Blood triglycerides normally increase following a meal. Measurements are affected by alcohol intake, medications, hormones, diet, menstrual cycle, time of day and recent exercise. For an accurate triglyceride assessment, two or three blood samples should be taken in the fasting state (no food or drink except water for 12 hours) at least one week apart.

What is a normal triglyceride level?

A triglyceride level below 250 mg/dl (milligrams/deciliter of blood) is considered normal if blood cholesterol levels are also normal. Normal blood cholesterol is below 200 mg/dl.

About 5 to 10 percent of adult Americans have borderline high blood triglyceride levels - 250 to 500 mg/dl. Very few people have triglycerides of over 500 mg/dl. These high levels are rarely caused by diet alone and usually involve other risk factors for heart disease as well as other disease states.

How can I reduce my high blood triglycerides?

Here are some tips that may help:

- Choose to eat low-fat foods. Limit the number of egg yolks to 3-4 per week and include plenty of grains and vegetables for fiber. Cutting down on fruit juice and dried fruit may lower triglyceride levels. Some individuals may require further diet restrictions.

- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Often, weight loss alone can significantly lower triglyceride levels.
- Exercise regularly. Maintaining a healthy weight, combined with regular exercise, can lower triglycerides.
- Stop smoking.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For example, a woman should drink no more than 5 ounces of wine a day and a man should drink no more than 2-12 oz. beers a day. Alcohol increases triglycerides for some

individuals. Your doctor may advise reducing or eliminating alcohol intake. Drug therapy may be indicated if these measures are not effective.

■ *The New Cholesterol Countdown*, The American Dietetic Association, 1989.

■ *The Tufts University Guide to Total Nutrition* by Stanley Gershoff, with Catherine Whitney and the editorial board of the Tufts University Diet & Nutrition Letter. Harper and Row, 1990.

■ *Dr. Jean Mayer's Diet and Nutrition Guide* by Jean Mayer and Jeanne P. Goldberg. Pharos Books, 1990.

The care of a physician and a registered dietitian is very important when trying to lower triglycerides. To find a registered dietitian, ask your doctor, call your local hospital, or ask for a referral from the National Referral Network at the Consumer Nutrition Hot Line at 800/366-1655.

How Many Fat Grams Should I Eat?

If you eat at this daily calorie level:	Eat no more than this number of fat grams daily:
1,200	40
1,500	50
1,800	60
2,000	65
2,200	70
2,500	80

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT REDUCING DIETARY FAT:

■ *60 Days of Low-Fat, Low-Cost Meals in Minutes* by M.J. Smith. Chronimed Publishing, 1992.

■ *The New American Diet System* by Sonja L. and William E. Connor. Simon and Schuster, 1991.

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