

## Eating to Lower Triglycerides

Triglycerides are a type of fat. They can enter your blood three ways.

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

### Healthy Triglyceride Levels

- Your triglycerides level should be no more than **150 mg/dl**.
- The **optimal (best)** triglyceride level should be **100 mg/dl or less**.

### High Triglycerides

High levels of triglycerides in your blood can increase your chance of getting 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, you can get a dangerous condition called “pancreatitis” (inflammation in the pancreas).

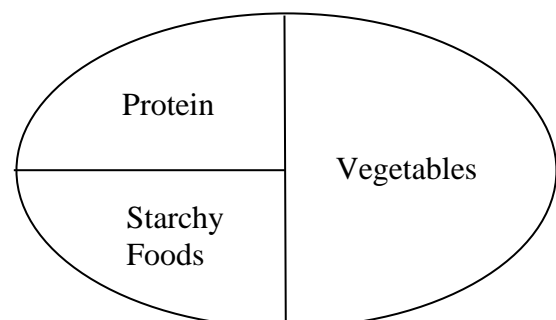
### Causes of High Triglycerides

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

### Ways to Lower Triglyceride Levels

High blood triglycerides may increase your risk for heart disease. Changing your eating and exercise habits can quickly improve triglyceride levels. If your triglyceride levels are high, start by decreasing sugar in your diet. Try the steps below to decrease your 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 can decrease with a 10–15-pound weight loss.
2. **Limit foods high in sugar.** Some of the sugar you eat becomes triglycerides in your body. Sweetened drinks and fruit juice (even if unsweetened) are a major source of sugar. **Limit sugar sweetened drinks to less than 6 ounces per day.**
3. **Choose small portions of starchy foods (grains and starchy vegetables).** Starchy foods are broken down into sugars by your body and can become triglycerides.
4. **Build a balanced meal.** Aim to fill your plate with  $\frac{1}{4}$  lean protein, or protein low in saturated fat, and only  $\frac{1}{4}$  with starchy foods. Fill the rest of your plate with vegetables.



5. **Include healthy fat in your diet.** Healthy (unsaturated) fats can help you stay satisfied longer. If you limit your fat intake too much you may be hungry for more carbohydrate foods, which could increase triglycerides.
6. **Include protein rich foods in your meals.** Meals that contain some protein, along with carbohydrates and a little fat, are often more satisfying.
7. **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol provides extra calories that make weight loss harder. It also encourages the body to make more triglycerides and increases blood pressure. Avoid alcohol or enjoy it in small amounts.
8. **Exercise.** Exercise helps the muscles to use triglycerides for energy. The more you exercise, the more your triglyceride levels will drop. Exercise can also 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 intensity exercise per week.
9. **Ask your provider about a high dose fish oil supplement.** Taking 3,000-4,000 mg of fish oil (EPA + DHA) has been shown to lower triglycerides.

Food	Serving Ideas	Limit
<b>Fruit</b> (2-4 Servings per day)  Contains natural sugars that can raise triglyceride levels. Whole fruit is a better choice than juice because it is high in fiber.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup fresh fruit (melon, berries, etc.)</li> <li>• 1 small piece of fresh fruit (apple, orange, peach, pear)</li> <li>• ½ cup canned fruit, unsweetened or in its own juice</li> <li>• ¼ cup dried fruit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sweetened fruit juice</li> </ul>
<b>Vegetables</b> (No limit)  Most vegetables are low in carbohydrates and calories, and high in fiber. They are a good source of vitamins, minerals, and other healthy nutrients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any non-starchy vegetable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starchy vegetables</li> </ul>

Food	Serving Ideas	Limit
<p><b>Starchy Foods</b> (Limit to ¼ of your plate)</p> <p>These sugars can become triglycerides if eaten in large amounts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 slice (1 ounce) of bread, white, whole wheat, or rye</li> <li>• ½ of a hamburger or hot dog bun, English muffin, or bagel</li> <li>• 1 four-inch pancake or waffle</li> <li>• 1 six-inch tortilla (flour/corn)</li> <li>• 1/3 cup of cooked rice (white/brown), quinoa, bulgur, or couscous</li> <li>• ½ cup of cooked pasta or noodles (white/whole wheat)</li> <li>• 1/3 cup beans or lentils</li> <li>• ½ cup of white potato, sweet potato, peas, parsnips, or corn</li> <li>• ¾ cup unsweetened corn flakes or ½ cup sweetened cornflakes</li> <li>• ½ cup shredded wheat or ¼ cup granola</li> <li>• ½ cup cooked oatmeal</li> <li>• 3 cups popped popcorn or 10-12 tortilla chips</li> <li>• 6 soda crackers</li> </ul>	<p>Large servings of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread</li> <li>• Potatoes</li> <li>• Pasta</li> <li>• Cereal</li> <li>• Rice</li> <li>• Noodles</li> </ul>
<p><b>Protein</b> (Fill ¼ of your plate)</p> <p>Protein can provide longer-lasting energy than meals that contain little or no protein.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-fat or fat-free milk, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, or cheese</li> <li>• Lean ham, pork tenderloin, round, or sirloin steak</li> <li>• Baked, boiled, or grilled fish</li> <li>• Poultry</li> <li>• Tuna packed in water</li> <li>• Eggs (up to 4 yolks/week, unlimited egg whites)</li> <li>• Soy milk</li> <li>• Tofu or edamame</li> <li>• Veggie burgers</li> <li>• Nuts, seeds or nut/seed butters</li> <li>• Herring or sardines</li> <li>• Hummus (garbanzo bean spread)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saturated fats</li> <li>• High-fat meats</li> </ul>

Food	Serving Ideas	Limit
<b>Fats</b> Enjoy small amounts of healthy unsaturated fats. 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olive oil</li> <li>• Nuts</li> <li>• Seeds</li> <li>• Avocados</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatty meats</li> <li>• High-fat dairy products (cheese, ice cream, butter)</li> <li>• High-fat desserts</li> </ul>
<b>Sweets and Desserts</b> (Limit to 1 serving a day)  Daily limit for women: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 teaspoons (25 grams) added sugar</li> </ul> Daily limit for men: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 teaspoons (38 grams) added sugar</li> </ul>	Small daily amounts (3-6 tsp) of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table sugar</li> <li>• Syrup</li> <li>• Jelly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sugar sweetened drinks (no more than 6 ounces per day)</li> <li>• </li> </ul>

### Making Healthy Meal Choices

Compare the breakfast choices below. Both meals have the same number of calories.

#### Meal #1:

- 2 slices of white toast with jelly
- Coffee or juice

#### Meal # 2 (Better Choice):

- 1 slice whole wheat toast
- 1 tbsp peanut butter
- Apple
- Skim milk

**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.

#### Tips

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

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

### Who to Call

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](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

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

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF)  
**(608) 287-2770**

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 © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#361