Kids Health - High Triglycerides

Many things affect your child's chances of having heart disease as an adult. Some risk factors, such as family history, cannot be changed. Some of the **risk factors** can be changed**,** such as:

- Poor food choices
- Low fitness/activity level
- Being overweight
- Tobacco use
- High blood pressure
- Low HDL cholesterol
- Sleep problems (especially sleep apnea)

The build-up of cholesterol in arteries starts in children as young as 2 years of age. By making wise food and activity choices now, your child can lower the risk of these **problems when they are older**:

- A **stroke** caused by blocked arteries that lead to the brain.
- A **heart attack** caused by blocked arteries around the heart.
- **Peripheral vascular disease** caused by blocked arteries in the legs.

Triglycerides are fats found in your food. Your liver can make them from extra calories, alcohol and sugars in your diet. They are also found in extra body fat. When triglyceride levels are high, HDL ("happy" or "good" cholesterol) levels tend to be low.

To lower triglycerides levels:

- Achieve a healthier weight or body structure.
- Get 60 minutes of exercise most days of the week.
- Drink **water or skim/low-fat milk** instead of juice, soda, or other sugary drinks.
- Eat whole grain breads, cereals, pastas and rice.
- Enjoy small servings of sweet snacks or desserts once in a while.

Carbohydrates (Carbs) in Your Diet
Carbs include starches (bread, pasta, rice, noodles) and sugars. They are good sources of energy. Eating a lot of carbs can raise triglyceride and blood sugar levels. This leads to weight gain. A good rule is to keep portions of these foods to the size of your child's fist.

Starches come from whole grains (whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole wheat pasta) and refined grains (white bread and pasta, white rice), fruit and sugars. Whole grain starches **do not** raise blood sugar and triglycerides as much as refined starches. They also contain more fiber, vitamins and minerals than refined grains. Choose whole grain starches when you can.

Sugars enter the blood very quickly after you eat them. This causes a quick rise in blood sugar and triglycerides. Fruit juice (even unsweetened kinds) and regular soda contain about 10 teaspoons of sugar per 12 ounces. If you drink these often, it can be hard to control triglycerides and blood sugar. **Do not** drink more than 4 ounces of sugary drinks per day.

Diet drinks **do not** contain sugar or calories. They do not raise blood sugar or triglyceride levels. They may contain non-nutritive sweeteners. Water and plain low-fat milk are the best choices. Try infusing water with fruit, vegetables, or herbs for added flavor.

Read nutrition labels and choose foods with 10 grams or less of sugar per serving more often.

Breads, Grains, Cereal
Choose:

- Whole grain bread
- Whole grain English muffins
- Whole grain bagels
- Whole grain pancakes
- Whole grain waffles
- Whole wheat crackers
- Whole grain pasta
- Whole wheat or corn tortillas
- Brown rice, barley, quinoa, bulgur

Avoid:

- White breads
- Croissants
- Crescent rolls
- Sweet rolls
- Donuts
- Sugary cereals
- Muffins, biscuits
- White crackers
- White pasta
- Chow Mein or ramen noodles
- White tortillas
- White rice

Snacks and Desserts
Choose in small amounts:

- Baked chips
- Pretzels
- Air-popped popcorn (or popped in healthy fats such as sunflower oil)
- Rice cakes
- Vanilla wafers
- Graham crackers
- Ginger snaps
- Granola and breakfast bars
- Low-fat yogurt, frozen yogurt
- Reduced fat ice cream
- Popsicles (no sugar added)
- Fruit, dried fruit (without added sugar)

Avoid:

- Regular tortilla chips, potato chips or corn chips
- Cakes
- Candy
- Cookies
- Pop-Tarts®
- Ice cream, Sherbet, Sorbet
- Fruit snacks

Physical Fitness
Spending too much time in front of a screen (phone, computer, video games, TV) takes away from active time in a child's day. Children over 2 years old should not have more than 2 hours of screen time a day. Exchange screen time for extra minutes of physical play. Physical activity and exercise strengthen your heart. It also raises your HDL, lowers your triglycerides and helps with weight control.

Activities like jogging, walking, biking, dancing and swimming can be the most helpful to lower triglycerides. Children can play at the park or outside with friends. Aim for 60 minutes of energetic play or aerobic activity daily.

Who to Call
If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

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 © 3/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#7543