

## QUICK FACTS ON TRIGLYCERIDES

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### Heart Health – The Good, The Bad and *The Ugly*

- While most people are aware of the roles “good” (HDL) cholesterol and “bad” (LDL) cholesterol have- many are unaware of the threat the “ugly” – **being triglycerides** – pose to heart health.
- **Triglycerides** are one of several types of fat that exist in our blood stream and are stored in our fat tissue. They are found naturally not only in our body but in certain foods. The body stores fat in the form of triglycerides, when there is an excess of calorie intake. Triglyceride levels vary from normal to very high.

Triglyceride Level	Classification
Less than 150 mg/dL	Normal
150–199 mg/dL	Borderline-high
200–499 mg/dL	High
500 mg/dL or higher	Very high

### More than Just Cholesterol

- Knowing your total cholesterol is not enough. It’s possible to have cholesterol in the “normal” range and still have elevated triglycerides.
- Even when cholesterol levels are normal, **increased triglycerides can predict a two to three-fold increased risk of death by cardiovascular disease.**
- Elevated triglycerides not only increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, but are also associated with an increased risk of stroke and are linked to increased insulin resistance – a risk factor for diabetes.<sup>i,ii</sup>
- Independent of bad cholesterol and good cholesterol levels, a pattern of elevated triglycerides in families can predict the risk of heart attack deaths years in advance.<sup>iii</sup>

### Triglycerides in Men and Women – A Different Risk

- It is important for both men and women to know their triglyceride levels. However, women especially should be sure to manage their triglyceride levels as very high triglycerides pose a greater risk to women than men.
  - **Example:** Having a triglyceride level greater than 190 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) represents an increased heart disease risk for women, while the corresponding level for men is as high as 400 (mg/dL).

### Know Your Numbers and Work With Your Doctor:

- Staying healthy requires a balanced diet and exercise and working with your doctor to manage your health.

- If your doctor recommends treating high triglycerides – he or she may recommend a prescription medication in addition to diet and exercise.

### **Prescription Options for Triglyceride Reduction**

- **Prescription Omega-3:** Omega-3 is a natural substance your body needs, but cannot adequately produce on its own. Omega-3s are found in some plants and in the oil of certain fish, such as salmon and mackerel. The FDA has approved prescription omega-3s (but not supplement omega-3s) for the treatment of very high triglycerides.
  - Lowers triglycerides by 45%
  - Increases “good” cholesterol (HDL-C) % by 9%
  - Decreases NON-HDL-C by 14% overall
- **Fibrates:** This is another type of medication that raises HDL cholesterol and lowers triglyceride levels in the blood.
  - Lower triglycerides 20-40%
  - Increase “good” cholesterol (HDL-C) 10-20%
  - Warning against combined statin use
- **Prescription Niacin (nicotinic acid):** This works on the liver to slow the body’s production of blood fats. It’s very effective in raising levels of HDL cholesterol and can also be used in combination with other drugs.
  - Lowers triglycerides 20-30%
  - Increases “good” cholesterol (HDL-C) 15-35%
  - Issues with patient tolerability
- **Statins:** These drugs block a liver enzyme your body uses to make cholesterol, which helps lower your levels of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides.
  - Lower triglycerides 10-30%
  - Increase “good” cholesterol (HDL-C) 5-15%
  - Warning against combined fibrate use
- It is important to tell your health care provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Medicines may affect each other, causing side effects.
- The American Heart Association (AHA) does not recommend the use of dietary supplements to treat cardiovascular disease. AHA only recommends the use of FDA-regulated medicines for the prescribed treatment of diagnosed cardiovascular disease. Only prescription drugs are reviewed by the FDA to ensure proper strength and effectiveness.
- **Please refer to the patient brochure put out by AHA and ACP to educate yourself further on this topic.**

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<sup>i</sup> *Circulation* December 11, 2001;104:2892-2897

<sup>ii</sup> Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource June 2002

<sup>iii</sup> Austin MA, et al. *Circulation*. 2000;101:2777.