Eating Guidelines to Lower Triglycerides

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

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

High levels of triglycerides in your blood can increase the chance that you will have 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 can also get in the way of forming good cholesterol (HDL). If triglycerides are very high, a dangerous condition called pancreatitis, inflammation in the pancreas, can develop.

**Optimal triglycerides are: 100 mg/dl or less**

**Normal triglycerides should be: 150 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 on a daily basis
- Having diabetes or kidney disease
- Genetics
- Some medicines

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 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, coffee drinks, Hi-C®, some sports drinks, some flavored waters), and fruit juice (even if unsweetened) are often a major source of sugar. Twelve ounces (1 ½ cups) of any of these drinks will provide at least 10 teaspoons of sugar. **Limit drinks containing 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 in order to reduce sugar and excess energy in your diet.
**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 small piece of fresh fruit (apple, orange, peach, pear, etc)
- ½ banana
- 15 grapes
- 1 cup cantaloupe or honeydew melon
- 1 ¼ cup strawberries or watermelon
- ½ cup canned fruit, unsweetened or in its own juice
- 1/4 cup dried fruit
- 4 ounces (1/2 cup) of fruit juice

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, hot dog bun, English muffin, or bagel
- 1/3 cup of cooked rice, white or brown
- 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
- 1/2 cup shredded wheat or ¼ cup granola
- ½ cup cooked oatmeal
- 3 cups popped popcorn or 10-12 tortilla chips
- 6 soda crackers

**Make Your Plate Look Like This**
Aim for one quarter lean protein, or protein low in saturated fat, and only one quarter 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!
4. **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.

5. **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 use triglycerides for energy. So the more you exercise, the more your triglyceride levels will drop. And, exercise can boost your levels of good HDL (good) cholesterol! Exercise can reduce triglycerides even without weight loss. Aim for at least 150 minutes 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

- Skim milk
- Low-fat or fat-free yogurt
- Low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese
- Part skim milk cheese (string, Mozzarella)
- Low-fat or fat-free cream cheese
- Lean ham, pork tenderloin, round steak
- Eggs (up to 4 yolks/week, unlimited egg whites)

- Fish-baked or broiled cod, haddock, perch
- Tuna packed in water
- Imitation crab legs
- Turkey or chicken
- Soy milk or soy protein powder
- Tofu
- Veggie burgers (made from soy)

### Proteins that are higher in unsaturated fat and calories, but low in saturated fat

- Peanut butter
- Sunflower seeds
- Nuts
- Soy nuts
- Herring or sardines
- Salmon, tuna steak, swordfish
- Hummus (garbanzo bean spread)
Compare these two breakfast examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meal #1</th>
<th>Meal #2 (Better Choice)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 slices white toast with jelly</td>
<td>1 slice whole wheat toast with peanut butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee or juice</td>
<td>Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skim milk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 blood stream, the body is less likely to produce excess triglycerides. Including fiber, protein and healthy fat in your meals and snacks helps control your hunger. This may help you eat smaller meals and avoid high calorie snacks.

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. You can 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 make 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 contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed 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.