

Understanding Your Screening Numbers

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are a type of fat in the blood. They provide and store energy for the body. Triglycerides are made by the liver and blood levels may elevate based on dietary choices. Although triglycerides serve an important role in the body, too much can increase risk of heart disease and stroke.

Triglycerides Ranges

Below are the recommended ranges for fasting triglyceride levels. Triglyceride levels (fasting and non-fasting) over 200 should be followed up with a primary care doctor.

	Adults (mg/dL)
Desirable	<150
Borderline High	150-199
High	200-499
Very High	>500

Source: Circulation. 2011;123:2292-2333.

Reasons for High Triglycerides

Triglycerides above the recommended levels can be caused by a number of reasons including certain medical conditions, medications, genetics, and lifestyle choices.

Some common causes are listed below:

- Overweight and obesity
- Uncontrolled diabetes and/or high blood sugar
- Eating too many foods and drinks with added sugar and/or refined carbohydrates (sweets, baked goods, white flour products, candy, soda pop, sweetened tea, etc.)
- Drinking excess alcohol
- Eating excess fat, especially saturated fat (cheese, full-fat dairy, fatty cuts of meat, butter, ice cream, processed snacks, baked goods, etc.)
- Eating excess calories

Managing Triglycerides

- **Manage weight.** For individuals with weight categorized as overweight or obese, **reducing weight by 5-10% can help improve triglyceride numbers.**
- **Limit refined carbohydrates.** Refined grains include white bread, white pasta, white rice, and products made with refined or “enriched” flour (e.g. crackers, pita, cookies, cereal). Instead, **choose 100% whole grains** like brown rice, quinoa, oats, popcorn, and whole wheat flour products.
- **Limit foods with added sugar.** Added sugar is commonly found in sugar-sweetened beverages (i.e. soda, tea, sports drinks), pastries, ice cream, candy, sugary cereal, granola bars, and other sweets. **The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugar to no more than 25g per day for women and 36g per day for men.**
- **Include omega-3 fats from fish sources.** Fatty fish is the best source of omega-3 fats, but they can also be found in some plant-based foods such as walnuts, chia seeds, and flaxseed meal. **The American Heart Association recommends eating 2 servings of fatty fish per week** (i.e. salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring).
 - **Avoid trans fats.** These are found in fried foods, some margarines, shortenings, and convenience foods.
 - **Limit saturated fats.** These are found in cheese, full-fat dairy, fatty cuts of meat, butter, ice cream, processed snacks, and baked goods.
- **Watch your portion sizes.** Eating too many calories can cause an increase in triglyceride levels.
- **Fill most of your plate with vegetables and fruit.** Aim to make at least half of your plate plant-based with vegetables and/or fruit at every meal.
- **Eliminate or limit alcohol intake.** Alcohol increases triglyceride levels and the excess calories can make it difficult to manage weight.
- **Exercise most days of the week.** The American Heart Association recommends at least **150 minutes of moderate-intensity.**



Canada Eat Well Plate

