

TRIGLYCERIDES AND YOUR HEART

When it comes to heart health, most people are aware of the need to lower their cholesterol level. But did you know that your triglyceride level also matters? There is increasing evidence to support that high triglycerides may increase the risk of death from heart disease. Therefore, it is important to monitor **both** cholesterol and triglyceride levels. High triglycerides are also associated with insulin resistance, a major factor in type 2 diabetes. Extremely high triglycerides may be associated with enlargement of the liver and spleen, pancreatitis (an inflammation of the pancreas) and fatty deposits in the tendon and skin.

When high triglycerides occur in combination with these risk factors: high blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess abdominal fat and low good cholesterol (HDL) level, the condition is known as “Metabolic Syndrome” or “Syndrome X”. Metabolic Syndrome greatly increases a person’s risk for heart disease.

I. What are Triglycerides?

Triglycerides are a form of fat that is carried in your bloodstream. Most of the fat found in foods is made of triglycerides. Excess consumption of fat, protein or carbohydrates are converted into triglycerides and stored in the fat cells for later use. Excess triglycerides can increase the concentration of fat particles in the blood and contribute to fatty deposits in the arteries, thereby increasing the risk of heart disease.

II. Diagnosis of High Triglycerides

Triglyceride levels is often determined by a simple blood test called a full lipid profile, which measures total cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglycerides. It is best to have the test done after at least a 12 hour fast as triglyceride levels can be influenced by recent food and

alcohol intake. A normal triglyceride level is less than 150 mg/dL. A level above 200 mg/dL is considered undesirable.

III. Causes of High Triglycerides

- Family history
- Obesity
- Thyroid, kidney, pancreatic or liver disease
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Excess calories in the diet
- Excess alcohol and sugar intake
- Certain drugs – estrogen (female hormone), steroids, diuretics (water pill)

IV. How to Lower Your Triglycerides

- Lose excess weight
- Increase physical activity
- Control diabetes
- Limit or avoid alcohol
- Reduce intake of sugary foods and sweetened beverages
- Reduce the amount of saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol in your diet. Consider replacing them with foods high in monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats, like canola oil or olive oil.
- Limit juices and refined carbohydrates – white rice, white bread, noodles
- Eat fish high in omega-3 fatty acids – salmon, sardines, tuna, trout, mackerel, black cod
- Eat foods high in fiber – whole wheat bread, brown rice, oats, dried beans, vegetables, fruits

If lifestyle and dietary changes fail to lower your triglyceride levels, your doctor may prescribe a lipid lowering medication for you.

V. What is Metabolic Syndrome or Syndrome X?

Syndrome X is defined by the presence of 3 or more of the following conditions:

- High triglycerides –150 mg/dL or higher
- Abdominal obesity –
Men: waist measurement over 40”
Women: waist measurement over 35”
- Low HDL (good) cholesterol –
Men: less than 40 mg/dL
Women: less than 50 mg/dL
- High blood pressure –
130/85 mmHg or higher

- High fasting blood sugar –
100 mg/dL or higher

Persons with Syndrome X should make extra efforts to reduce their risk of heart disease with proper diet, physical activity, weight management, and if necessary medications.

For more information about heart health, contact the American Heart Association at (800) 242-8721 or visit their website at www.americanheart.org