

How to Control High Triglycerides *By Ethiopia Gebeyehu MD*

If you're one of many individuals facing high triglyceride levels, the good news is that, for many, lifestyle changes can make a difference!

Like cholesterol, triglycerides are a type of fat which is found in the blood and serve as a source of energy for the body. However, if your body takes in more than it can burn, you may develop high triglycerides, also known as hypertriglyceridemia. This condition can lead to atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, and lead to an increased risk of stroke, heart attack and heart disease. Normal levels are 150 or less. Extremely elevated triglycerides (above 500) can damage the pancreas and cause pancreatitis.

High triglycerides can be caused by obesity, diabetes, kidney disease, genetic factors, hypothyroidism, alcohol use and certain medications such as steroids and birth control pills. It usually causes no symptoms, but is detected through a lab

test called a fasting lipid panel.

In many cases, mild to moderately elevated triglycerides can be treated with lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and maintaining a normal body weight. Recommendations include:

- Choose a diet rich in complex carbohydrates and reduce intake of simple carbohydrates, especially foods that are high in sugar.
- Stop or reduce alcohol use.
- Reduce intake of foods high in saturated fats such as fatty cuts of meat, whole milk/dairy products, palm oil, coconut oil, vegetable shortening, margarine and butter.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Read food labels to help guide you in making healthy food selections.
- Participate in regular aerobic

exercise such as walking, biking, jogging and swimming. Add 30 minutes of exercise at least 3-4 days per week to lower triglycerides, reduce excess body weight and maintain heart health.

- Lose weight, if needed. Even a modest weight loss of 10-15 lbs can make a significant difference in improving overall health.

In addition to lifestyle changes, it may also be necessary to utilize medications to control high triglycerides - these medications include fibrates (gemfibrozil, fenofibrate), niacin, statins and omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil).

If you find it difficult or challenging to make these lifestyle changes, I would encourage you to seek support from a nutritionist and also consider pairing up with an exercise partner or a fitness trainer. Do not be discouraged. Even small, consistent incremental changes can make a significant impact. Remember to schedule regular visits with your medical provider so you can work together on improving your health and achieving your wellness goals.

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