What are triglycerides?

- Triglycerides are a form of fat that circulates in your blood. Triglycerides are used as an energy source by your body.
- After eating, any calories that are not used immediately get stored as triglycerides inside fat cells.
- Although your body needs some triglycerides, too much may lead to heart disease, stroke, or pancreatitis.

Causes of elevated triglycerides:

- Diet high in fat, certain carbohydrates, or sugar
- Too much alcohol
- Not enough exercise
- Being overweight
- Certain medical conditions (e.g. high blood sugar)
- Certain medications
- Heredity

Triglyceride levels:

- Your clinician will check your triglyceride level with the same blood test used to measure cholesterol.
- Recent food intake can increase triglycerides, so it is important to fast for 8-12 hours before your blood test. You may drink water or coffee (with nothing in it) during the time you are fasting.
- Compare your triglyceride level to the following categories:
  - Normal: less than 150 mg/dL
  - Borderline High: 150-199 mg/dL
  - High: 200-499 mg/dL
  - Very High: 500 mg/dL or more
- If your triglycerides are 500 mg/dL or more, you are at risk for pancreatitis. Pancreatitis can cause many other health problems and may be life-threatening. If your triglycerides are very high, your clinician will talk to you about making aggressive lifestyle changes and possibly taking medication to lower your triglycerides.

Ways to lower triglycerides:

- **Diet**
  - Cut back on fat. Eliminate the trans fats and decrease the amount of saturated fats that you eat. Eat less processed foods, fast food, fried foods, beef, pork, whole milk, and ice cream.
  - Increase fiber intake. Fiber makes you feel full longer, so you may eat less. Most green, yellow, and orange vegetables; brown rice; whole grains, like oatmeal, are high in fiber.
  - Eat healthier calories. Only eat small portions of “starchy” foods (ex. pasta, rice, potatoes, corn, peas). Eat more vegetables than fruit. Limit fruit and fruit juice; these have natural sugar. Decrease sweets.
  - Increase omega-3 intake. Certain fish, like salmon and tuna, have good amounts of omega-3.
  - Read nutrition labels. This can help you determine the right portion size and keep track of your daily intake of calories, fats, and sugars.
  - Drink alcohol only in moderation. Men should have no more than 2 drinks per day and women no more than 1 drink per day.

- **Exercise**
  - Exercise at least 30 minutes, 5 times a week. People with diabetes should exercise at least every other day. This can be done with many fun activities such as walking your dog, biking, playing a sport, going to the gym, swimming, dancing, or even taking the stairs at work.

- **Weight loss**
  - Lose weight by eating a healthy diet and doing regular exercise. Losing 5-10% of your body weight can lower triglycerides about 20%. Do not take supplements to lose weight unless your clinician tells you it is safe to do it.

- **Medications**
  - In addition to healthy lifestyle changes, your clinician may recommend that you take prescription medication and/or fish oil supplements to lower your triglyceride levels.
  - For best results, it is important to take your medication as prescribed. Talk to your clinician, if you have any questions or concerns about your medications.

- **Diabetes**
  - If your blood sugar is high, your triglycerides may also be high. Take your diabetes medication as prescribed. Test your blood sugar as recommended. Stay on schedule for your follow-up appointments for diabetes.

References: