

better health

## tr i - u m p h o f t h e h e a r t

*Move over, HDL and LDL. Triglycerides are elbowing their way into the healthy-heart picture.*

**M**arie Passi started counting the fat grams in her diet and the lipid levels in her blood while she was still in her late 30s. Both her parents died of heart disease relatively young, putting her in a high-risk category. But it wasn't until recently—prompted by news reports and discussion at the medical office where she works—that she began paying closer attention to her triglycerides, a type of blood fat akin to HDL and LDL (“good” and “bad” cholesterol, respectively).

Triglycerides aren't only on Passi's radar screen now, but also in the sights of a growing number of experts who believe that they may be far more important predictors of heart disease than once thought. So important, in fact, that the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology recommended last April that physicians consider a lower target level of blood triglycerides, particularly for their female patients: 150 milligrams per deciliter, versus the current cutoff for “normal” triglycerides of 200

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mg/dL. And although this statement did not address men's levels, there's weighty new evidence that lower may be better for them, too.

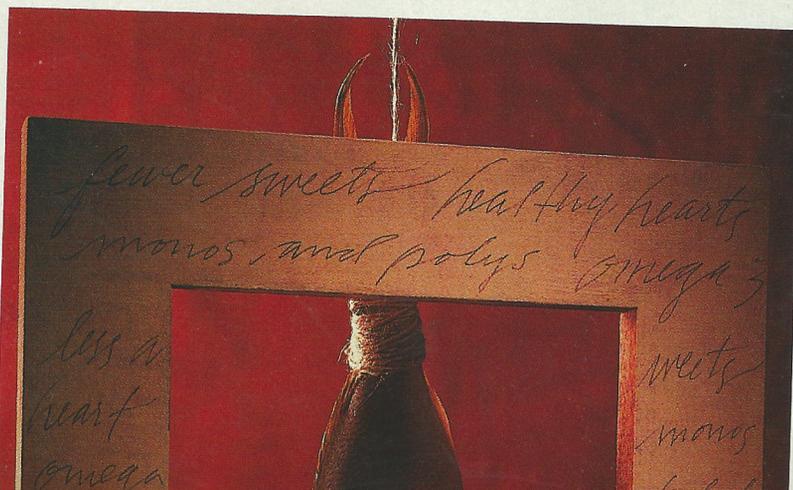
Triglycerides' link to heart disease is nothing new; the connection was first established in the late 1950s. In fact, triglycerides have for years routinely appeared along with total cholesterol, LDL, and HDL cholesterol levels on the standard lipid (blood-fat) profiles. Their importance was eclipsed, though, when other risk factors, such as levels of HDL

cholesterol, emerged as more powerful predictors of heart disease.

“But we've recognized in recent years that HDL and LDL levels don't tell the whole story,” says Michael Miller, M.D., director of preventive cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore. “A lot of individuals are at risk with completely normal cholesterol, so other factors need to be looked at.”

The role triglycerides actually play in predicting heart-disease risk is still unclear. One theory holds that high levels

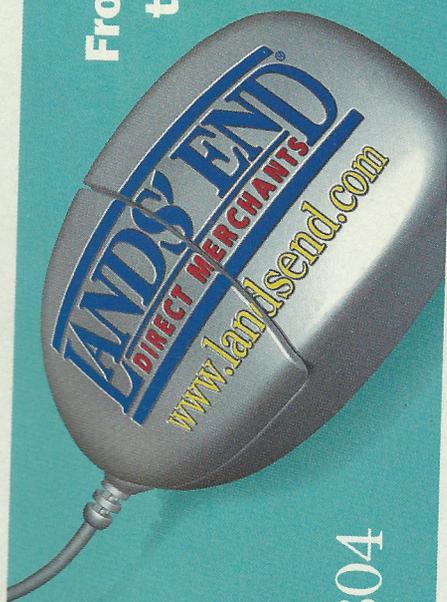
**Fish tale: The omega-3 fats in fish give high triglycerides the hook.**



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