

Cholesterol isn't the only harmful fat, study warns

By MICHAEL LASALANDRA

NEW ORLEANS — You finally got your cholesterol down and you're feeling pretty good about it. But don't celebrate yet.

Now, a surprising new study says you've got something else to worry about: your triglyceride level.

Evidence presented yesterday at the American Heart Association's annual scientific session says triglyceride, another type of blood fat that increases with consumption of high-fat foods and alcohol, may be just as important as cholesterol as a risk factor for heart disease.

And most Americans have triglyceride levels that are way too high, according to the University of Maryland study.

In fact, triglyceride levels previously considered to be safe by most experts are actually dangerous, said Dr. Mi-

Turn to Page 20

Docs say new heart risk plagues most Americans

From Page 1

chael Miller, director of preventive cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

National guidelines say levels of triglycerides should be below 200 milligrams per deciliter of blood.

But Miller's study found that levels as low as 100 were still risky.

"Previously, nobody thought triglyceride was a major risk factor at these low levels," he said.

The study of 492 patients over 18 years found that even a level as low as 100 was associated with twice the risk of heart disease compared to those with lower levels.

The good news is that triglyceride levels are more easily reduced through dietary change and exercise than are cholesterol levels.

Miller said running is very effective and noted that many runners have levels around 50.

Diets high in fatty fishes such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and tuna are also good for reducing triglyceride levels.

Triglycerides can also be reduced by medications.

But, pass up the beers and potato chips.

Triglycerides are increased by eating high-fat foods and consuming three to four alcoholic drinks a day.

They circulate in the blood, especially after a high-fat meal.

If they are not broken down, they can cause fatty deposits in the blood vessels.

In addition to triglycerides, the other most important risk factors for heart disease are diabetes and low levels of HDL or "good" cholesterol, Miller said.

Overall cholesterol levels, LDL or "bad" cholesterol levels and the ratio of overall cholesterol to HDL cholesterol are also considered important.

The National Cholesterol Education Program says a blood level of 200 or lower for cholesterol is desirable.

Years ago, the recommendation was 250.

Miller said the desirable level for triglyceride may need to be reduced from the current 200 — the national median — to something lower.

Dr. Jan Breslow, president of the AHA, said that if Miller's studies can be confirmed it may be advisable to cut the recommended triglyceride number.

In a second study, Dr. Robert Rosenson of the

Rush Medical Center in Chicago reported that triglycerides may contribute to coronary artery disease by making the blood more thick and sluggish.

He found that when triglycerides hit the 190 level, they start contributing to blood viscosity.

"The more viscous the blood is, the harder it is for the heart to pump it to the tissues, particularly through the smallest blood vessels."

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