Association between normal triglyceride and insulin resistance in US adults without other risk factors: a cross-sectional study from the US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007–2014

Chunli Bi,1 Lijuan Wang,2 Chong Sun,1 Mengzi Sun,1 Pingping Zheng,1 Zhiqiang Xue,1 Li Shen,1 Pan Pan,1 Jiagen Li,1 Yaogai Lv,1 Anning Zhang,1 Bo Li,1 Xinyao Zhang,3 Yan Yao,1 Lina Jin1

ABSTRACT
Objective Traditionally, the absence of insulin resistance risk factors (IRRFs) was considered a low risk for insulin resistance (IR). However, IR also existed in certain individuals without IRRFs; thus this study aims to explore predictors of IR targeted at the population without IRRFs.

Design Cross-sectional survey.

Setting National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.

Participants Participants without regular IRRFs (IRRF-Free, n=2478) and a subgroup without optimal IRRFs (IRRF-Optimal, n=1414) were involved in this study.

Primary and secondary outcome measure IRRFs and the optimal cut-off value of triglyceride (TG) to predict IR.

Results Overall, the prevalence of IR was 6.9% and 5.7% in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, respectively. TG and waist circumference were independently associated with the prevalence of IR in both the groups (OR=1.010 to 10.20; p<0.05 for all), where TG was positively associated with IR. The area under the receiver operating characteristic curve of TG was 0.7016 and the optimal cut-off value of triglyceride (TG) to predict IR was 129.5 mg/dL and 131.5 mg/dL in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, respectively.

Conclusion There is an association between TG and IR even in the normal range of TG concentration. Therefore, normal TG could be used as an important indicator to predict the prevalence of IR in the absence of IRRFs.

BACKGROUND
Insulin resistance (IR) is a metabolic status in which insulin-dependent tissues become insensitive to insulin while the body does not respond to the glucose load and results in metabolic imbalance of carbohydrate, lipid and protein.1–3 It is indicated that systemic toxicity, such as endothelial dysfunction, increase in inflammation stress, pro-thrombogenesis and pro-oxidation,4 5 could be caused by IR, which leads to the development of diabetes mellitus,6 cardiovascular diseases7 and cancer.8

A 3.2-year prospective study found out that the incidence of diabetes was much higher in aged people with IR (12.22%) than those without IR (3.6%).9 Another 13-year follow-up study in patients with hypertension showed that the total number of cardiovascular diseases and events were significantly higher among patients with IR as compared with patients who are sensitive to insulin.10 In addition, a 15-year cohort study demonstrated that the overall mortality of patients with cancer with IR is as much greater (14.3%) than in those without IR (8.7%).11 Thus, IR is considered as a potent as well as strong predictor of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer.9 12 13

As the number of studies on IR is burgeoning, various IR risk factors (IRRFs),
such as smoking, obesity, dyslipidaemia and hypertension, have been recognised and are generally agreed on as common IRRFs. A cohort survey on healthy children from eight European countries revealed that the incidence of IR was 10.9% within the follow-up 2 years, which implied that people might still develop IR even in the absence of IRRFs. However, these individuals, who were without IRRFs, tend to be ignored and do not serve as a focus group for disease prevention.

The study of the effects of blood lipids on IR is more pronounced in studies on IRRFs and has shown that IR is mostly associated with elevation of blood lipids, especially triglyceride (TG). Typically, the incidence of IR will be of concern when the level of TG elevates abnormally. However, individuals will still develop IR in the normal range of blood lipids, which has not received sufficient attention. In this study, we explored potential predictors of IR in the population with the absence of IRRFs based on the data from the 2007–2014 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Our study showed that TG was a good predictor of IR even in the absence of IRRFs. The optimal cut-off value of TG to predict IR was 79.5 mg/dL and 81.5 mg/dL in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, which was lower than the normal value, respectively. It suggested that early TG monitoring has implications to prevent IR and to decrease the onset of IR related to chronic diseases.

**METHODS**

**Study design and study population**

Data were derived from a cross-sectional study of the NHANES conducted by the National Centre for Health Statistics (NCHS) of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/). NHANES was based on a complex, layered, multistage probability design, which obtained the national representative sample of non-institutionalised residents in the USA. In this study, a total of 40,617 subjects were enrolled in 2007–2014 NHANES. First, 31,404 subjects were excluded because they lacked demographic characteristics and laboratory examination information. Furthermore, 6,735 subjects were excluded due to diabetes (1,609 subjects), smoking (1,630 subjects), hypertension (867 subjects), dyslipidaemia (1,771 subjects) and obesity (858 subjects). Finally, 2,478 subjects (≥20 years of age) were enrolled in the IRRF-Free group. Within the IRRF-Free group, we also defined a subgroup as without optimal IRRFs (IRRF-Optimal). In all, 1,064 subjects were excluded due to stricter blood pressure (BP; n=397) and blood lipids (n=667). Subsequently, 1,414 subjects were involved in the IRRF-Optimal group (figure 1).

**Data collection and measurement**

All information was collected by investigators who had been uniformly trained. The data included demographics...
| Variable                                      | Total (N=2478) | IR (N=200) | Non-IR (N=2278) | Total (N=1414) | IR (N=89) | Non-IR (N=1325) |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| **Baseline characteristics**                  |                |            |                 |                |           |                 |
| Age †                                         | 43.7 (42.5–44.8) | 47.0 (43.8–50.1) | 43.5 (42.2–44.7) | 39.8 (38.5–41.0) | 43.1 (37.5–48.7) | 39.6 (38.3–40.8) |
| Gender ‡                                       | Male           | 111 (45.3) | 91 (45.5)       | 202 (45.3)      | 119 (43.8) | 83 (40.0)       |
|                                               | Female         | 134 (54.7) | 109 (54.5)      | 225 (54.7)      | 112 (46.2) | 142 (57.0)      |
| Race                                          | Caucasian       | 1235 (50.6) | 1028 (51.4)     | 2253 (49.6)     | 1354 (50.0) | 900 (41.0)      |
|                                               | African American| 1143 (46.2) | 1028 (51.4)     | 2165 (46.6)     | 1354 (50.0) | 900 (41.0)      |
|                                               | Other           | 242 (9.8)  | 20 (1.0)        | 222 (4.5)       | 13 (0.6)   | 21 (0.9)        |
| **Marital status**                            | Married        | 1347 (55.0) | 110 (55.0)      | 1237 (55.0)     | 731 (52.0) | 610 (46.0)      |
|                                               | Widowed         | 115 (4.7)  | 11 (0.5)        | 104 (4.6)       | 52 (3.6)   | 50 (3.8)        |
|                                               | Divorced        | 211 (8.5)  | 12 (0.6)        | 199 (8.8)       | 109 (7.6)  | 90 (6.8)        |
|                                               | Separation      | 66 (2.7)   | 6 (0.3)         | 60 (2.6)        | 30 (2.1)   | 30 (2.2)        |
|                                               | Unmarried       | 556 (22.3) | 48 (2.4)        | 508 (22.4)      | 338 (24.4) | 270 (20.3)      |
| **Educational level**                         | Less than grade 9 education | 188 (7.6)  | 15 (0.8)        | 173 (7.6)       | 89 (6.3)   | 84 (6.3)        |
|                                               | Grade 9–11 education | 154 (6.2)  | 12 (0.6)        | 142 (6.2)       | 86 (6.0)   | 56 (4.2)        |
|                                               | Some college students or junior college degree | 359 (14.5) | 29 (1.4)        | 330 (14.6)      | 194 (13.7) | 136 (10.3)      |
|                                               | Bachelor degree or above | 923 (37.5) | 80 (4.0)        | 843 (37.2)      | 480 (34.0) | 363 (27.2)      |
| **Weight (kg)**                               | 71.0 (69.7–72.7) | 70.3 (69.0–72.4) | 70.7 (69.5–72.8) | 69.4 (68.6–70.2) | 70.5 (70.3–71.7) | 68.8 (68.0–69.7) |
| **Height (cm)**                               | 169.5 (168.9–170.1) | 169.2 (168.7–170.4) | 169.7 (169.1–170.2) | 169.4 (168.6–170.0) | 170.1 (169.7–170.4) | 169.3 (168.8–169.6) |
| **BMI (kg/m²)**                               | 24.6 (24.2–25.8) | 24.4 (24.0–25.2) | 24.5 (24.2–25.4) | 24.3 (24.0–25.2) | 24.3 (24.0–24.5) | 24.2 (24.0–24.5) |
| **WC (cm)**                                   | 88.2 (87.6–88.8) | 87.6 (87.0–88.4) | 88.0 (87.6–88.4) | 86.0 (85.4–87.6) | 86.1 (85.6–87.3) | 85.8 (85.4–86.6) |
| **Triglycerides (mg/dL)**                     | 183.9 (182.7–185.2) | 184.2 (182.9–185.1) | 183.8 (182.5–185.1) | 183.9 (182.5–185.1) | 183.9 (182.5–185.1) | 183.8 (182.5–185.1) |
| **Total cholesterol (mg/dL)**                 | 224.6 (224.1–225.1) | 224.9 (224.5–225.6) | 225.1 (224.7–226.3) | 225.0 (224.7–226.3) | 225.2 (224.7–226.4) | 225.1 (224.7–226.3) |
| **HDL-C (mg/dL)**                             | 39.1 (38.4–39.6) | 39.3 (38.9–39.9) | 39.6 (39.2–39.9) | 39.1 (38.4–39.6) | 39.2 (38.6–39.7) | 39.1 (38.5–39.6) |
| **LDL-C (mg/dL)**                             | 105.4 (104.5–106.4) | 105.4 (104.4–106.4) | 105.4 (104.4–106.4) | 105.4 (104.4–106.4) | 105.4 (104.4–106.4) | 105.4 (104.4–106.4) |

*Continued*
| Variable | IRRF-Free | IRRF-Optimal | Total | Non-IR | IR |
|----------|-----------|--------------|-------|--------|----|
| HbA1c (%) | 5.3 (5.2–5.4) | 5.3 (5.2–5.3) | 5.3 (5.2–5.3) | 5.3 (5.2–5.3) | 5.3 (5.2–5.3) |
| FBG (mg/dL) | 95.4 (94.9–95.9) | 95.4 (94.9–95.9) | 95.4 (94.9–95.9) | 95.4 (94.9–95.9) | 95.4 (94.9–95.9) |
| Insulin (μU/mL) | 7.8 (7.5–8.1) | 7.8 (7.5–8.1) | 7.8 (7.5–8.1) | 7.8 (7.5–8.1) | 7.8 (7.5–8.1) |
| SBP (mm Hg) | 113.2 (112.6–113.9) | 113.2 (112.6–113.9) | 113.2 (112.6–113.9) | 113.2 (112.6–113.9) | 113.2 (112.6–113.9) |
| DBP (mm Hg) | 67.1 (66.5–67.7) | 67.1 (66.5–67.7) | 67.1 (66.5–67.7) | 67.1 (66.5–67.7) | 67.1 (66.5–67.7) |

*Data are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. All data except for sample size are weighted according to the directions of the National Centre for Health Statistic.†Continuous variables (means and 95% CIs).‡Categorical variables (counts and weighted percentages).BMI, body mass index; DBP, diastolic blood pressure; HDL-C, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol; LDL-C, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol; SBP, systolic blood pressure; WC, waist circumference.

Assessment criteria

**Smoking**

Smoking status was categorised into current smoker (who had smoked at least one cigarette per day in the past 30 days), former smoker (who had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in one’s lifetime but who at the time of the survey did not smoke at all), and never-smoker (who had never smoked cigarettes or had smoked less than 100 cigarettes in one’s lifetime).

**Hypertension**

Hypertension was defined as resting systolic BP (SBP) and/or diastolic BP (DBP) ≥140/90 mm Hg following the Seventh Report of Joint National Committee standard. Another relatively strict criterion was based on the 2017 American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Blood Pressure Guide.

**Dyslipidemia**

In this study, dyslipidaemia was defined as follows: TC >240 mg/dL, TG >200 mg/dL, low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) >160 mg/dL or male high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) <40 mg/dL, female HDL-C <50 mg/dL. A more stringent criterion was defined in the guidelines provided in the third report of the National Cholesterol Education Programme Adult Treatment Group III (NCEP ATP III): TC >200 mg/dL, TG >150 mg/dL, LDL-C >130 mg/L, male HDL-C <40 mg/dL, female HDL-C <50 mg/dL.

**Diabetes mellitus**

NHANES defined type 2 diabetes through questionnaires, fasting plasma glucose (FPG) and glycosylated haemoglobin (HbA1c) levels. Diabetes was diagnosed according to self-reported responses or currently using anti-diabetic drugs or insulin. Undiagnosed diabetes was defined according to the 2015 American Diabetes...
Table 2  Multivariate analysis for the prevalence of IR in IRRF-Free among US adult, 2007–2014* N=2478

| Variable                              | P     | OR     | 95% CI       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------------|
| Intercept                             | <0.001| 6.719E-6 | 1.369E-7 0.000 |
| Race                                  | 0.041 |        |              |
| Mexican American                      | 0.918 | 1.044  | 0.452 2.414  |
| Other Hispanics                       | 0.824 | 1.107  | 0.446 2.744  |
| Non-Hispanic whites                   | 0.410 | 0.699  | 0.295 1.656  |
| Non-Hispanic black                    | 0.270 | 1.689  | 0.657 4.390  |
| Non-Hispanic multiracial              | –     | 1.000  | –             |
| Educational level                     | 0.038 |        |              |
| Less than grade 9 education           | 0.776 | 1.158  | 0.414 3.242  |
| Grade 9–11 education                  | 0.050 | 2.346  | 1.000 5.508  |
| High school graduate/GED or equivalent| 0.021 | 2.209  | 1.134 4.302  |
| Some college students or joint AA degrees| 0.024 | 2.149  | 1.108 4.168  |
| Bachelor degree or above              | –     | 1.000  | –             |
| WC (cm)                               | <0.001| 1.092  | 1.044 1.142  |
| TG (mg/dL)                            | <0.001| 1.010  | 1.005 1.015  |

*Data are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. All data except for sample size are weighted accounting for the complex study design according to the directions of the National Centre for Health Statistics.

IR, insulin resistance; IRRF, IR risk factor; TG, triglyceride; WC, waist circumference.

Table 3  Multivariate analysis for the prevalence of IR in IRRF-Optimal among US adult, 2007–2014* N=1414

| Variable                              | P     | OR     | 95% CI       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------------|
| Intercept                             | <0.001| 3.792E-5 | 1.73E-7 0.0134 |
| WC (cm)                               | <0.001| 1.098  | 1.040 1.160  |
| TG (mg/dL)                            | <0.001| 1.020  | 1.008 1.031  |

*Data are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. All data except for sample size are weighted accounting for the complex study design according to the directions of the National Centre for Health Statistics.

IR, insulin resistance; IRRF, IR risk factor; TG, triglyceride; WC, waist circumference.

Figure 2  Relation between TG and IR in IRRF-Free and IRRF-Optimal groups. IR, insulin resistance; IRRF, IR risk factor; TG, triglyceride.

Association standard: FPG ≥ 126 mg/dL or HbA1c ≥ 6.5% (48 mmol/mL). IR was indexed by the homeostasis model assessment (HOMA) formula: (fasting insulin (μU/mL) × fasting glucose (mmol/L))/22.5. IR was defined by the values equal to or greater than the 75th percentile of the HOMA-IR. In this study, the value was 3.7, which represented the diagnostic value of IR in the non-diabetic population rather than a general sample.

**Definition of IRRF-Free group and IRRF-Optimal group**

The IRRF-Free group included people who met the following conditions: (1) untreated SBP < 140 mm Hg and/or DBP < 90 mm Hg; (2) untreated FPG < 126 mg/dL; (3) untreated TC ≤ 240 mg/dL, TG ≤ 200 mg/dL, LDL-C ≤ 160 mg/dL and male HDL-C ≥ 40 mg/dL, female HDL-C ≥ 50 mg/dL; (4) BMI < 30 kg/m2; (5) no smoking and (6) non-diabetics. Within the IRRF-Free group, we also defined a subgroup of individuals with Optimal IRRFs (IRRF-Optimal): (1) SBP < 130 mm Hg and/or DBP < 80 mm Hg, (2) TC ≤ 200 mg/dL, TG ≤ 150 mg/dL, LDL-C ≤ 130 mg/dL.

**Statistical analysis**

To generate nationally representative estimates, all analyses were accounted for the complex, stratified nature of NHANES to explain complex survey design, survey non-response and planned oversampling. We used the SURVEY procedure including the morning fasting sub-sample 2-year weights (WTSAF2YR), stratum (SDMVSTRA) and primary sampling unit (SDMVPSU) recommended by the National Institutes of Health (NCHS) for the NHANES analysis. The prevalence of IR was a weighted percentage of IR under complex sampling, which was equal to the number of IR divided by the total number of people. Complex sample package of IBM SPSS Statistics...
Figure 3  Area under ROC curves of triglyceride to predict IR in IRRF-Free and IRRF-Optimal groups. IR, insulin resistance; IRRF, IR risk factor; ROC, receiver operating characteristic.

V.24.0 (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA) was used to perform statistical analyses. Continuous variables were presented as means and 95% CIs using complex sample descriptions. Categorical variables were presented as counts and weighted percentages using complex sample frequencies. A complex sample univariate logistic regression analysis was used to assess differences in baseline characteristics between participants with and without IR. Univariate logistic regression analysis of statistically significant differences included in complex samples multivariate logistic regression analysis to analyse the association for multiple covariates with the presence of IR in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group. To estimate optimal cut-off values, TG was used as the test variable, excluding other control variables, and IR was used as a state variable. The optimal cut-off value of TG to predict IR was determined by the highest score of the Jordan index of the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve. Statistical significance was set at a p value<0.05.

Consent to participate
All participants provided a written informed consent, and the study was approved by the NCHS Research Ethics Review Board (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/default.aspx).37

Patient and public involvement
Patients and the general public were not involved in the development of the research question or outcome measure, study design or recruitment and conduct of this study. There are no plans for the study results to be disseminated directly to participants.

RESULTS
Characterisation of the IRRF-Free and IRRF-Optimal study population
Table 1 shows the basic characteristics of the participants. Overall, data from 2478 subjects (1143 men and 1335 women) in the IRRF-Free group and 1441 subjects (622 men and 792 women) in the IRRF-Optimal groups were assessed. The prevalence of IR was 6.9% and 5.7% in both the groups, respectively. The anthropometric, clinical and biochemical characteristics of the participants are summarised in table 1. Patients with IR had higher levels of TG, TC, LDL-C, FPG and insulin than those without IR in the two groups.

Predictors of IR presence
Univariate logistic regression analysis
Regarding the risk factors of IR, our outcomes, which were based on univariate logistic regression analysis, are presented in online supplementary table 1. In the IRRF-Free group, the result of univariate logistic regression demonstrated that age (p=0.038; OR=1.013, 95% CI=1.001 to 1.025), male (p<0.001; OR=2.229, 95% CI=1.376 to 3.612), non-Hispanic black (p=0.039; OR=1.384, 95% CI=0.648 to 2.956), grade 9–11 education (p<0.001; OR=3.465, 95% CI=1.655 to 7.212), BMI (p<0.001; OR=1.344, 95% CI=1.244 to 1.452), WC (p<0.001; OR=1.102, 95% CI=1.078 to 1.126), TG (p<0.001; OR=1.017, 95% CI=1.013 to 1.021), HDL-C (p<0.001; OR=0.946, 95% CI=0.923 to 0.969) and SBP (p<0.001; OR=1.035, 95% CI=1.018 to 1.051) were associated with IR. In the IRRF-Optimal group, the result of univariate logistic regression demonstrated that male (p=0.004; OR=2.322, 95% CI=1.202 to 4.485), non-Hispanic black (p=0.011; OR=2.964, 95% CI=1.293 to 6.792), grade 9–11 education (p<0.001; OR=5.134, 95% CI=1.971 to 13.369), BMI (p<0.001; OR=1.322, 95% CI=1.174 to 1.487), WC (p<0.001; OR=1.108, 95% CI=1.070 to 1.148), TG (p<0.001; OR=1.027, 95% CI=1.015 to 1.040), HDL-C (p=0.002; OR=0.933, 95% CI=0.892 to 0.976) and SBP (p=0.005; OR=1.035, 95% CI=1.001 to 1.061) were associated with IR.

| Table 4  The optimal cut-off of triglyceride to predict insulin resistance among US adult 2007–2014* |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-------------|
|                | TG (mg/dL) | Sensitivity (%) | Specificity (%) | Youden index | AUC | P       | AUC (95% CI)  |
| IRRF-Free      | 79.5        | 0.782       | 0.543       | 0.325       | 0.7016 | <0.001 | 0.7013          | 0.7018          |
| IRRF-Optimal   | 81.5        | 0.706       | 0.687       | 0.393       | 0.7219 | <0.001 | 0.7215          | 0.7222          |

*Data are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. All data except for sample size are weighted accounting for the complex study design according to the directions of the National Centre for Health Statistics. AUC, area under curve; CI, confidence interval.
The results of multivariate logistic regression analysis results are shown in tables 2 and 3. In the IRRF-Free group, the results indicated that the significant predictors of IR developing were non-Hispanic black (p=0.041; OR=1.689, 95% CI=1.057 to 2.639), non-obese (p<0.001; OR=8.534, 95% CI=1.988 to 35.559), non-hyperglycaemia (p=0.048; OR=2.421, 95% CI=1.056 to 5.536), BMI (p=0.004; OR=1.056, 95% CI=1.009 to 1.103), WC (p=0.033; OR=1.084, 95% CI=1.022 to 1.150) and TG (p<0.001; OR=1.019, 95% CI=1.006 to 1.031). In the IRRF-Optimal group, BMI (p=0.042; OR=1.081, 95% CI=1.014 to 1.149), WC (p=0.003; OR=1.098, 95% CI=1.044 to 1.160) and TG (p<0.001; OR=1.020, 95% CI=1.005 to 1.015) were associated with IR.

Normal TG was independently associated with IR

The relationship between TG and IR in the absence of dyslipidaemia, hypertension, diabetes and smoking is illustrated in figure 2. As TG levels increased, there was an increase in the prevalence of IR. In the IRRF-Free group, the prevalence of IR increased from 2.1% in the 40–60 mg/dL category to 19.7% in the 180–200 mg/dL category. In the IRRF-Optimal group, IR prevalence increased from 2.7% in the 30–50 mg/dL category to 15.4% in the 130–150 mg/dL category.

ROC curve of TG to predict IR

Figure 3 shows the ROC curves of TG to predict IR in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group. The area under the curve (AUC) of TG was 0.7016 (95% CI=0.677 to 0.726) and 0.7219 (95% CI=0.7215 to 0.7222), respectively. The optimal cut-off value of TG to predict IR was 81.5 mg/dL and 81.5 mg/dL, respectively. The prevalence of IR was 47.0% in an NHANES study of the population with obesity deficiency, which was far beyond our findings. This may be due to the restrictions of our study population as they were relatively strict. However, in our study, the prevalence of IR was at least 5.7% in the IRRF-Optimal population who are non-smokers, non-diabetic and non-obese with normal BP and lipids, which indicated that additional factors play a major role in affecting the early IR. In the present study, we found that TG was independently associated with IR despite the IRRF-Free group or the IRRF-Optimal group, which was consistent with the results of previous similar study. The possible mechanism is that TG was hydrolysed into free fatty acid (FFA) by various lipases, and FFA disrupts the insulin signalling pathway through multiple pathways. For example, FFA could interrupt the expression of lipid regulation and lead to the accumulation of lipid, which will disrupt the insulin metabolism in liver and resulting in IR. FFA can induce IR by activating oxidative stress and activate the inflammation pathway to induce the functional disorder of insulin-secreting cells, resulting in IR.

Interestingly, there was a significant association between TG and IR even when TG was in the normal range which was stated in the NCEP ATP III guideline, and 81.5 mg/dL can be acted as the cut-off value of TG to predict the prevalence of IR. Other studies have reported that 158 mg/dL and 132 mg/dL could be used as a cut-off value of TG for men and women to predict IR, respectively, both were much higher than 81.5 mg/dL. In the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, when TG ranged in 81.5–150 mg/dL, the prevalence of IR was at least 12.0% and the number of IR in this range accounted for more than half of the total number of IR. Despite the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, 74.0% and 79.0% of

| TG (mg/dL) | IRRF-Free (N=2478) | IRRF-Optimal (N=1414) |
|-----------|-------------------|----------------------|
|           | IR (n) | Prevalence of IR (%) | AR% | IR (n) | Prevalence of IR (%) | AR% |
| <79.5     | 55     | 2.9                   | –   | <81.5   | 34     | 2.5                   | –   |
| 79.5–200  | 145    | 11.2                  | 74  | 81.5–150 | 55     | 12                    | 79  |
| Total     | 200    | 6.9                   | –   | Total  | 89     | 5.7                   | –   |

*Data are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys. All data except for sample size are weighted accounting for the complex study design according to the directions of the National Centre for Health Statistics. AR%, attributable risk per cent; IR, insulin resistance; IRRF, insulin resistance risk factor; TG, triglyceride.
IR were attributed to TG ranged in 79.5–200 mg/dL and 81.5–150 mg/dL, respectively. The finding implied that at least 74.0% of IR would be prevented in the absence of IRRFs if the normal level of TG was adjusted from 150 to 81.5 mg/dL. It is also possible that the ideal TG level can be much lower than the recommended value in the guideline. We recommend that effective measures should be taken to prevent the prevalence of IR when TG reaches 81.5 mg/dL. In addition, in a meta-analysis, TG has been identified as an independent predictor of coronary heart disease (CHD) even after adjustment for other confounders, and recent observational data suggest that TG levels exceeding 100 mg/dL predict future CHD events. Therefore, it is possible that our findings may have implications to pave a new way to prevent the development of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, etc.

In our study, WC was associated with IR, which consisted of previous studies. However, previous studies have shown that the relationship between WC and IR was more significant only in the elderly; therefore, WC was not suitable to be used as a predictor of IR in the whole population. Overall, TG is a common clinical parameter and will be an effective marker of IR to evaluate the health status of an individual, and it is of great significance for early intervention of IR and related diseases.

Some limitations should be noted in this study. First, the data were obtained from a cross-sectional survey; therefore, further studies are needed to explore the associations in a longitudinal setting. Second, HOMA-IR was used as an alternative to diagnose IR, with some limitations on its reproducibility and reliability. Finally, we did not evaluate the genetic contribution to disease development, which can be independent of IRRFs and could thus play an important role in our population.

In conclusion, the prevalence of IR was 6.9% and 5.7% in the IRRF-Free group and the IRRF-Optimal group, respectively. There is an association between TG and IR even in the normal range of TG concentration. Further studies are needed before any recommendation about lowering TG levels that are already in the normal range can be made. Thus, our findings are important for guiding the primary prevention and understanding of early IR.

Author affiliations
1Key Laboratory of Zoonosis Research & Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Jilin University School of Public Health, Changchun, China
2Department of Neurology, The Neuroscience Center, The First Hospital of Jilin University, Jilin University First Hospital, Changchun, China
3Department of Social Medicine and Health Management, Jilin University School of Public Health, Changchun, China

Contributors YC, CB, LJ and LW conceived the original idea for the study and designed the work. LJ and YC provided valuable insight regarding the methodological approach and organisation of the manuscript. CB, CS, MS, ZX and LJ carried out the statistical analyses and reviewed the consistency of data included in the paper. Chunli Bi drafted the manuscript. LS, PP, YZ, JL, AZ, BL, XZ, and LJ revised the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding This work was supported by the Natural Science Foundation of Science and Technology Department of Jilin Province, China [grant number: 20180101129JC]; the Outstanding Youth Foundation of Science and Technology Department of Jilin Province, China [grant number: 201705020494JH]; the National Natural Science Foundation of China [grant number: 11301213 and 11571068]; the National Key Research and Development Program of China [grant number: 2016YFC1303800].

Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Not required.

Ethics approval NHANES obtained Ethics Committee/Institutional Review Board approval by NCHS Research Ethics Review Board under Continuation of Protocol #2005-06, Protocol #2011-17 and Continuation of Protocol #2011-17 for 2007–2008/2009–2010 cycles, 2011–2012 cycles and for 2013–2014 cycle, respectively.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Data availability statement Data are available in a public, open access repository.

Open access This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt, build upon this work non-commercially, and license their derivative works on different terms, provided the original work is properly cited, appropriate credit is given, any changes made indicated, and the use is non-commercial. See: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/.

REFERENCES
1. Yuan M, Konstantopoulos N, Lee J, et al. Reversal of obesity- and diet-induced insulin resistance with salicylates or targeted disruption of IKKbeta. Science 2001;293:1673–7.
2. Samuel VT, Shulman GI. Mechanisms for insulin resistance: common threads and missing links. Cell 2012;148:852–71.
3. Moon S, Park JS, Ahn Y, Shinje M, Joon-Sung P, Youhern A. The cut-off values of triglycerides and glucose index for metabolic syndrome in American and Korean adolescents. J Korean Med Sci 2017;32:427.
4. Kernan WN, Viscoli CM, Furie KL, Kernan Walter N, Viscoli Catherine M, Furie Karen L, et al. Pioglitazone after ischemic stroke or transient ischemic attack. N Engl J Med 2016;374:1321–31.
5. Mathur KJ, Steinberg HO, Baron AD, Mathur Karen J, Baron Alain D. Insulin resistance in the vasculature. J Clin Invest 2013;123:1003–4.
6. Kar P, Holt RG, Partha K, Holt Richard IG. The effect of sulphonylureas on the microvascular and macrovascular complications of diabetes. Cardiovasc Drugs Ther 2008;22:207–13.
7. Yandrapalli S, Jolly G, Horbitt A, et al. Cardiovascular benefits and safety of non-insulin medications used in the treatment of type 2 diabetes mellitus. Postgrad Med 2017;129:811–21.
8. Choi E, Zhang X, Xing C, et al. Mitotic checkpoint regulators control insulin signaling and metabolic homeostasis. Cell 2016;166:567–81.
9. Welsh P, Preiss D, Lloyd SM, Paul W, et al. Contrasting associations of insulin resistance with diabetes, cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality in the elderly: proper long-term follow-up. Diabetologia 2014;57:2513–20.
10. Bigazzi R, Bianchi S, Buonocristiani E, et al. Increased cardiovascular events in hypertensive patients with insulin resistance: a 13-year follow-up. Nutr Metab Cardiovasc Dis 2008;18:314–9.
11. Persenghin G, Calori G, Lattuada G, Giannola P, Giliola C, Guido L, et al. Insulin resistance/hyperinsulinemia and cancer mortality: the Cremona study at the 15th year of follow-up. Acta Diabetol 2012;49:421–8.
12. Rutter MK, Wilson PWF, Sullivan LM, et al. Use of alternative thresholds defining insulin resistance to predict incident type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease. Circulation 2008;117:1003–9.
13. Anjana R, de Jong S, Gietema JA, et al. Cancer-Drug induced insulin resistance: innocent bystander or unusual suspect. Cancer Treat Rev 2015;41:376–84.
14. Will C, Bodemann P, Ghali WA, et al. Active smoking and the risk of type 2 diabetes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. JAMA 2007;298:2654–64.
15. Ying W, Roipel M, Bandyopadhyay G, et al. Adipose Tissue Macrophage-Derived Exosomal miRNAs Can Modulate In Vivo and In Vitro Insulin Sensitivity. Cell 2017;171:372–84.
16. Steinberger J, Daniels SR, Obesity DSP, et al. American Heart Association Atherosclerosis, Hypertension, and Obesity in the Young Committee (Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young). Obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes, and cardiovascular risk in children: an American heart association scientific statement from the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young). Obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes, and cardiovascular risk in children: an American heart association scientific statement from the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young). Obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes, and cardiovascular risk in children: an American heart association scientific statement from the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young). Obesity, insulin resistance, diabetes, and cardiovascular risk in children: an American heart association scientific statement from the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young). Obl...
Committee (Council on nutrition, physical activity, and metabolism). *Circulation* 2003;107:1448–53.

17. Pekkula J, Bönhorst C, Günther K, Jenny P, Claudia B, Kathrin G, et al. Longitudinal associations of lifestyle factors and weight status with insulin resistance (HOMA-IR) in preadolescent children: the large prospective cohort study IDECRS. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 2016;13:97.

18. Xiao C, Watonabe T, Zhang Y, et al. Enhanced cellular uptake of remnant high-density lipoprotein particles: a mechanism for high-density lipoprotein lowering in insulin resistance and hypertriglyceridemia. *Circ Res* 2008;103:159–66.

19. Digenio A, Dunbar RL, Alexander VJ, et al. Antisense-Mediated lowering of plasma apolipoprotein C-III by Volanesorsen improves dyslipidemia and insulin sensitivity in type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes Care* 2016;39:1408–15.

20. National center for health statistics. National health and nutrition examination survey: Analytic guidelines, 1999-2010. Available: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhanes2005-2006/nhanes05_06.htm.

21. Yin Y, Han W, Wang Y, et al. Identification of risk factors affecting impaired fasting glucose and diabetes in adult patients from Northeast China. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2015;12:12662–78.

22. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NHANES 2005-2006. Available: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/about/major/nhanes/nhanes2005-06/nhanes05_06.htm.

23. National Center for Health Statistics. Mobile exam center components descriptions. Available: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhanes/meccomp.pdf.

24. X. Xu T. Trends of cardiovascular risk factors among U.S. men and women with and without diabetes, 1988-2014. * BMC Public Health* 2017;17:893.

25. World Health Organization. *World Health Organization, 2000WHO Technical Report Series no. 894*.

26. Jacob T, Malinovskii A, Janson C, et al. Differential effect of cigarette smoke exposure on exhaled nitric oxide and blood eosinophils in healthy and asthmatic individuals. *J Breath Res* 2017;11:5606.

27. Horne DJ, Campo M, Ortiz JR, et al. Association between smoking and latent tuberculosis in the U.S. population: an analysis of the National health and nutrition examination survey. *PLoS One* 2012;7:e49050.

28. Mancia G, Grassi G, et al. European Society of Hypertension. Joint National Committee VII and European Society of Hypertension/ European Society of cardiology guidelines for evaluating and treating hypertension: a two-way road? *J Am Soc Nephrol* 2005;16 Suppl 1:S74–S77.

29. Bell KJL, Doust J, Glassiou P. Incremental benefits and harms of the 2017 American College of Cardiology/American heart association high blood pressure guideline. *JAMA Intern Med* 2018;178:755–7.

30. National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP). Expert panel on detection, evaluation, and treatment of high blood cholesterol in adults (adult treatment panel III) third report of the National cholesterol education program (NCEP) expert panel on detection, evaluation, and treatment of high blood cholesterol in adults (adult treatment panel III) final report. 285, 2001.

31. National Institutes of Health. The third report of the National cholesterol education program. expert panel on detection, evaluation, and treatment of high. blood cholesterol in adults (adult treatment panel III). Bethesda, MD, USA: National Institutes of Health, 2001NIH Publication 01-3670.

32. Zhang N, Yang X, Zhu X, et al. Type 2 diabetes mellitus unawareness, prevalence, trends and risk factors: National health and nutrition examination survey (NHANES) 1999-2010. *J Int Med Res* 2017;45:594–609.

33. Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and treatment of overweight and obesity in adults: the evidence report. Rockville, MD, USA: National Institutes of Health, 1998(NIH Publication No. 98-4083).

34. Haffner SM, Miettinen H, Stern MP. The homeostasis model in the San Antonio heart study. *Diabetes Care* 1997;20:1087–92.

35. Kim J-S, Kang H-T, Shim J-Y, et al. The association between the triglyceride to high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ratio with insulin resistance (HOMA-IR) in the general Korean population based on the National health and nutrition examination survey in 2007-2009. *Diabetes Res Clin Pract* 2012;97:132–8.

36. NHANES-Continuous. NHANES web Tutorial-Specifying weighting parameters. Available: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/tutorials/nhanes/rvstrDesign/Weighting/intro.htm.

37. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National center for health statistics. NCHS research ethics review board (erb) approval. Available: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/irba98.htm.

38. Kabadi SM, Lee BK, Lu L. Joint effects of obesity and vitamin D insufficiency on insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes: results from the NHANES 2001-2006. *Diabetes Care* 2012;35:2048–54.

39. Li N, Fu J, Koonen DP, et al. Are hypertriglyceridemia and low HDL causal factors in the development of insulin resistance? *Ther Apher Dial* 2017;21:720–33.

40. Boden G, Lebed B, Bongardt E, et al. Effects of acute changes of plasma free fatty acids on intramyocellular fat content and insulin resistance in healthy subjects. *Diabetes* 2001;50:1612–7.

41. Medina-Urrutia A, Posadas-Romero C, Posadas-Sánchez R, et al. Role of adiponectin and free fatty acids on the association between abdominal visceral fat and insulin resistance. *Cardiovasc Diabetol* 2015;14:20.

42. Ormsby MJ, Swift LL, Fazio S, et al. Free fatty acids are associated with metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance but not inflammation in systemic lupus erythematosus. *Lupus* 2012;21:820–33.

43. Tripathy D, Mohanty P, Dhindsa S, et al. Elevation of free fatty acids in patients with metabolic syndrome and insulin resistance but not inflammation in systemic lupus erythematosus. *Lupus* 2012;21:820–33.

44. Zhang L, Chen S, Deng A, et al. Association between lipid ratios and insulin resistance in a Chinese population. *PLoS One* 2015;10:e0116110.

45. Hokanson JE, Austin MA. Plasma triglyceride level is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease independent of high-density lipoprotein cholesterol level: a meta-analysis of population-based prospective studies. *J Cardiovasc Risk* 1996;3:213–9.

46. Miller M, Seidler A, Moalem S, et al. Normal triglyceride levels and coronary artery disease events: the Baltimore coronary observational long-term study. *J Am Coll Cardiol* 1998;31:1252–7.

47. Gautier A, Roussel R, Duculueze PH, et al. Increases in waist circumference and weight as predictors of type 2 diabetes in individuals with impaired fasting glucose: influence of baseline BMI: data from the DESIR study. *Diabetes Care* 2010;33:1850–2.

48. Lara M, Bustos P, Amigo H, et al. Is waist circumference a better predictor of blood pressure, insulin resistance and blood lipids than body mass index in young Chilean adults? *BMC Public Health* 2012;6:638.