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A joint consensus statement from the European Atherosclerosis Society and European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine

No need to fast before a cholesterol test

New research from Denmark, Canada and the US involving more than 300,000 individuals suggests that patients do not need to check their cholesterol levels on an empty stomach. So far fasting has been required before cholesterol and triglyceride measurement in all countries except Denmark, where non-fasting blood sampling has been used since 2009.

Fasting is a problem for many patients, and the latest research shows that cholesterol and triglyceride levels are similar whether you fast or not. Therefore, it is now advised that patients no longer need to fast. "This will improve patients compliance to preventive treatment aimed at reducing number of heart attacks and strokes, the main killers in the world," says Clinical Professor Børge Nordestgaard, Department of Clinical Medicine, Herlev Hospital, University of Copenhagen.

In Denmark, the use of random, non-fasting cholesterol testing at any time of the day irrespective of food intake has been used successfully since 2009. Patients, doctors and laboratories have all benefitted from this simplified procedure. For people at work, children, patients with diabetes and the elderly it is particularly beneficial not to have to fast before blood sampling for cholesterol and triglyceride testing.

International recommendation

This is the first international recommendation that fasting is no longer necessary before cholesterol and triglyceride testing. For cholesterol testing after a fast, patients are often inconvenienced by having to return on a separate visit and may default on essential testing. Also, because of fasting cholesterol testing doctors are burdened by having to review cholesterol findings at a later date, additional phone calls, e-mails, or even follow-up clinic visits, placing extra workloads on busy clinical staff. These problems disappear by using non-fasting cholesterol and triglyceride testing.

"That more patients will have their cholesterol and triglycerides measured will facilitate advice from their doctors on how best to prevent heart attacks and strokes in the future. We hope that non-fasting cholesterol testing will make more patients together with their doctors implement lifestyle changes and if necessary statin treatment to reduce the global burden of cardiovascular disease and premature death," adds Nordestgaard.

These recommendations represent a joint consensus statement from the European Atherosclerosis Society and European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine involving 21 World medical experts from Europe, Australia and the US.

The joint consensus statement will appear online April 27, 2016 at 7:00AM British Mean Time and 8:00AM European Central time:

Nordestgaard BG, Langsted A, Mora S, Kolovou G, Baum H, Bruckert E, Watts GF, Sypniewska G, Wiklund O, Borén J, Chapman MJ, Cobbaert C, Descamps OS, von Eckardstein A, Kamstrup PR, Pulkki K, Kronenberg F, Remaley AT, Rifai N, Ros E, Langlois M, for the European Atherosclerosis Society (EAS) and the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) joint consensus initiative. Fasting is not routinely required for determination of a lipid profile: Clinical and laboratory implications including flagging at desirable concentration cut-points. A joint consensus statement from the EAS and EFLM. **European Heart Journal** 2016; online April 27.

Contact: Professor, Chief Physician, MD, DMSc Børge G Nordestgaard:

E-mail: boerge.nordestgaard@regionh.dk

Mobile. +45 30287263