

Table 4. Lipid, lipoprotein and apolipoprotein parameters in subjects from FCHL families and control families based on genotype.

Variable	FCHL families		Control families	
	CC n=62	CT/TT n=58	CC n=39	CT/TT n=24
Plasma Chol	4.98 (1.14)	5.28(1.28)	4.89(0.96)	5.27(0.81)
Plasma Trig	1.06(1.23)	1.45(1.00) <sup>a</sup>	0.95(0.38)	0.97(0.45)
VLDL				
Chol	0.27(0.49)	0.45(0.50) <sup>c</sup>	0.20(0.15)	0.19(0.17)
Trig	0.55(0.97)	0.79(0.81) <sup>b</sup>	0.42(0.31)	0.41(0.32)
Apo B	6.99(10.03)	14.68(17.08) <sup>b</sup>	8.37(8.33)	8.63(5.01)
IDL				
Chol	0.17(0.12)	0.25(0.25) <sup>a</sup>	0.15(0.08)	0.16(0.16)
Trig	0.14(0.11)	0.17(0.13) <sup>b</sup>	0.11(0.05)	0.11(0.07)
Apo B	4.96(2.36)	6.51(5.36) <sup>a</sup>	4.77(3.31)	5.29(3.38)
LDL				
Chol	3.38(0.98)	3.37(1.03)	3.23(0.78)	3.65(0.67)
Trig	0.25(0.12)	0.27(0.11)	0.23(0.08)	0.26(0.11)
Apo B	76.54(21.09)	71.90(22.35)	70.33(17.85)	77.84(13.77)
HDL2	0.18(0.15)	0.20(0.11)	0.30(0.25)	0.27(0.12)
HDL3	0.93(0.27)	1.02(0.29)	1.05(0.20)	1.09(0.25)
Total HDL	1.13(0.30)	1.23(0.35)	1.35(0.37)	1.36(0.27)
Plasma apo A-I	113.52(18.14)	122.96(23.20) <sup>b</sup>	122.15(18.56)	121.49(18.96)
Plasma apo B	86.72(31.96)	90.12(33.16)	84.29(20.99)	89.67(19.91)
Plasma apo C-II	5.59(1.63)	5.77(1.30)	4.52(0.40)	4.30(0.36)
Plasma apo C-III	11.51(4.71)	12.75(4.64) <sup>a</sup>	10.78(1.26)	11.34(2.07)

Cholesterol and triglycerides in plasma and all fractions are expressed as mmol/L.

Apolipoproteins in plasma and all fractions are expressed in mg/dL.

All values expressed as means (SD).

Statistical differences assessed by ANOVA with data adjusted for age, gender and BMI.

<sup>a</sup> p<0.05; <sup>b</sup> p<0.01; <sup>c</sup> p<0.001 compared to the CC genotype in FCHL families.

Figure 1

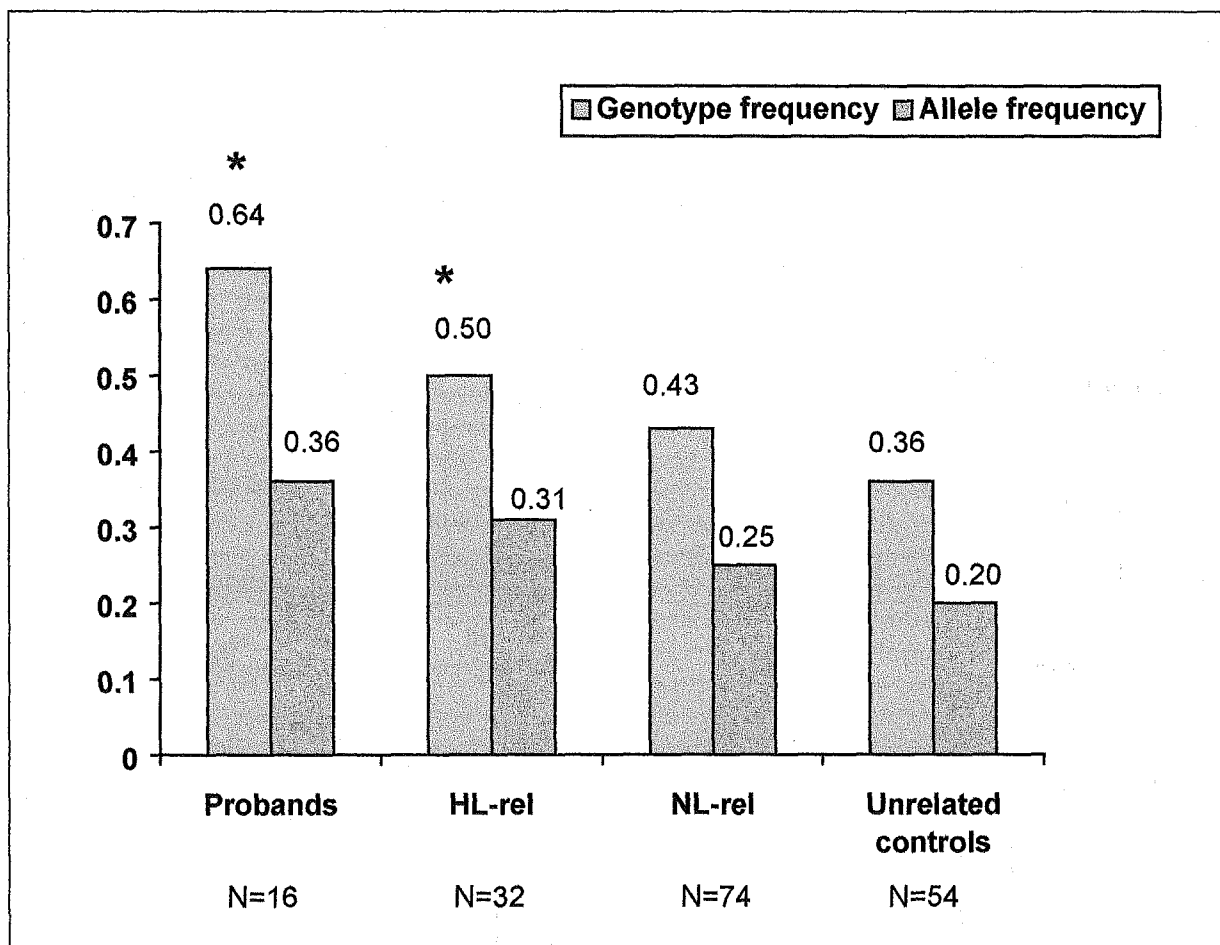


Figure 1.

Genotype (CT/TT) and allelic frequencies of the minor allele (T) in FCHL families: Probands, Hyperlipidemic relatives (HL-rel), Normolipidemic relatives (NL-rel), and unrelated Controls.

\* Statistically different from controls. Probands ( $p < 0.01$ ), HL-rel ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Figure 2.

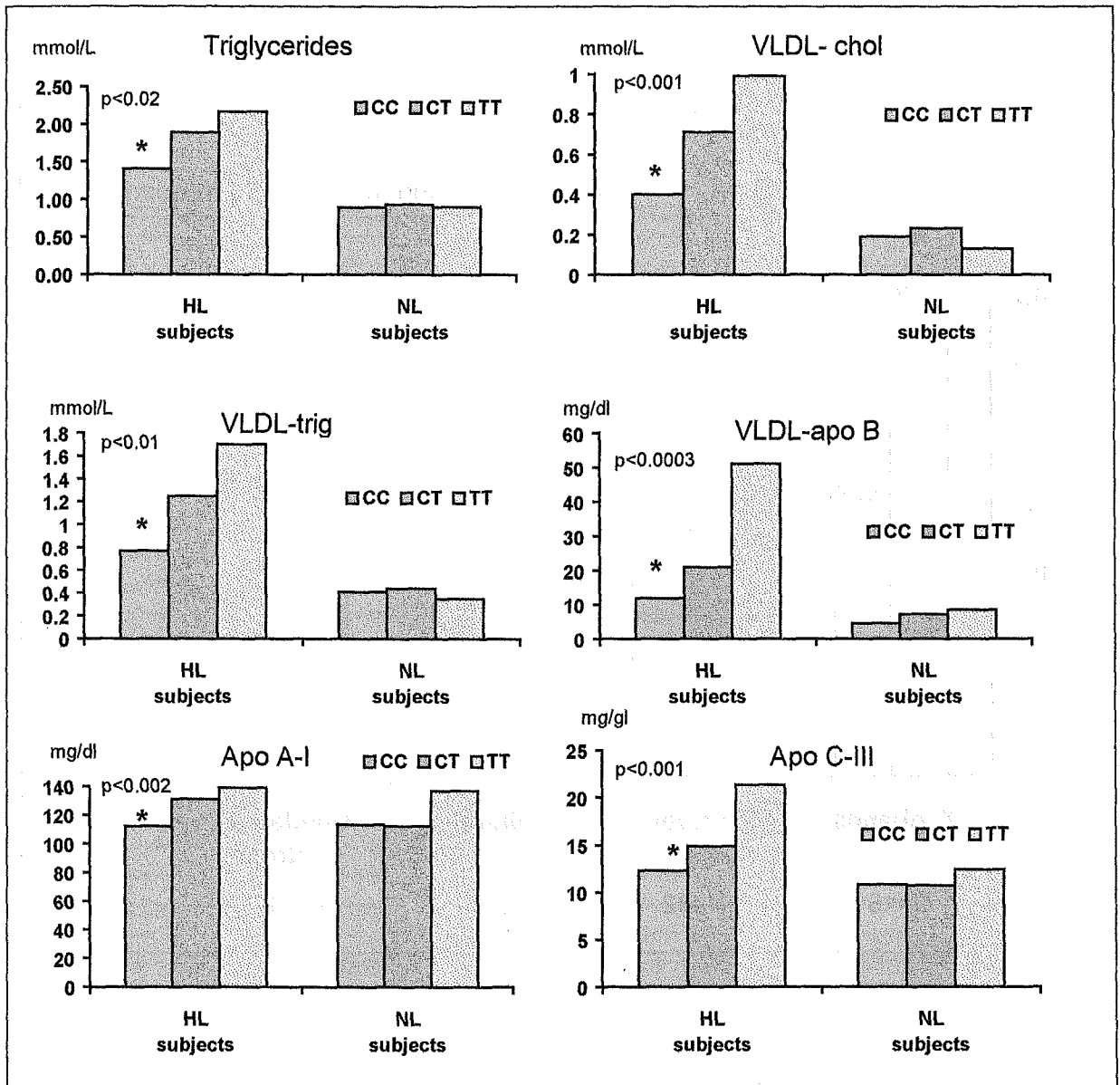


Figure 2. Genotype-status interaction in relation to concentrations of plasma triglycerides, VLDL-chol, VLDL-trig, VLDL-apoB, apo C-III and apo A-I. Note : Gene dosage observed only among the hyperlipidemic members of FCHL families. \* Statistically significant linear correlation.

## 4.4. ESTUDI 3

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**Estudi de les concentracions plasmàtiques de retinol en individus afectes d'hiperlipèmia familiar combinada.**

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Ribalta J, La Ville AE, Girona J, Vallvé JC, Masana L. *Low plasma vitamin A concentrations in familial combined hyperlipidemia. Arch Intern Med.* (En revisió).

## Low plasma vitamin A concentrations in familial combined hyperlipidemia.

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### Abstract

**Background :** Up to 20% of the survivors of acute myocardial infarction present with the heritable form of hyperlipidaemia termed familial combined hyperlipidemia (FCHL). Some of the genes reported to be involved in this disorder, such as that of lipoprotein lipase (LPL) and apolipoprotein (apo) C-III, are controlled by a peroxisome proliferator activated receptor (PPAR) / retinoic acid receptor X (RXR) regulatory system which is retinoic acid dependant. We hypothesised that the availability of retinoic acid or its precursor retinol (vitamin A) could be altered in FCHL and could help explain some aspects of the phenotypic expression of the disease.

**Methods :** Plasma lipids, lipoproteins, apolipoproteins and retinol concentrations were measured in 30 FCHL subjects (from 16 families) and 56 control subjects from 12 families. Since vitamin A circulates in close association with the plasma lipoproteins, all statistical analyses were performed on data adjusted for plasma cholesterol and triglyceride concentrations.

**Findings :** Plasma retinol concentrations in FCHL subjects were significantly lower than that of control subjects ( $418.9 \pm 229.5$  vs.  $888.9 \pm 352.2$   $\mu\text{g/L}$ , respectively;  $p < 0.0001$ ). Interestingly, plasma retinol concentration correlated significantly with plasma cholesterol ( $R = 0.38$ ;  $p < 0.003$ ), triglycerides ( $R = 0.23$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), LDL cholesterol ( $R = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and apolipoprotein B ( $R = 0.42$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) in controls whereas, in the FCHL subjects, it correlated significantly only with parameters of reverse cholesterol transport; HDL cholesterol ( $R = 0.44$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and apolipoprotein A-I ( $R = 0.53$ ;  $p < 0.002$ ).

**Interpretation :** This novel finding of highly significant decreased concentrations of plasma retinol in FCHL relative to control subjects gives support to the hypothesis that vitamin A might be involved in the expression of this disorder.

## Introduction

Familial combined hyperlipidemia (FCHL)<sup>1</sup> is the commonest genetic form of hyperlipidaemia and is present in about 20% of myocardial infarction survivors.<sup>2</sup> FCHL patients may present with hypercholesterolaemia, hypertriglyceridaemia or both. Moreover, the FCHL phenotype may vary among family members and even in the individual patient over time.<sup>3</sup> Although the aetiology of this highly heterogeneous disorder is not well understood,<sup>4</sup> several metabolic features such as very low density lipoprotein (VLDL) apolipoprotein (apo) B overproduction,<sup>5</sup> small dense low density lipoprotein (LDL) particles,<sup>6</sup> decreased lipoprotein lipase (LPL) activity<sup>7,8</sup> and elevated plasma apo C-III concentrations<sup>9</sup> have been described. Mutations in the LPL<sup>10,11</sup> and apo C-III<sup>12,13</sup> genes associated with decreased LPL activity or elevated apo C-III concentrations have been reported to be more frequent among FCHL subjects. The interaction between these genetic variants and environmental factors such as diet and obesity contribute to the individual expression of the FCHL phenotype. Hence, it is of considerable importance to identify the mechanisms by which these factors regulate gene expression. For example, the LPL and apo C-III genes are stimulated and repressed, respectively, by fibrate therapy and dietary fatty acids.<sup>14-16</sup> More precisely, the metabolic perturbation induced by environmental stimuli leads to the activation of a class of proteins belonging to the nuclear receptor superfamily termed Peroxisome Proliferator Activated Receptors (PPARs)<sup>17</sup> which, by heterodimerising with the 9-*cis*-retinoic acid receptor X (RXR), recognise response elements (RE) of the promoter region of the above-mentioned target genes and, hence, control their expression. Both elements of this signalling pathway, PPAR and RXR, need to be physiologically activated to promote a regulatory effect on the target genes. PPARs are activated by multiple stimuli directly resulting from the action of hypolipidaemic agents (such as the fibrates), diet and lipid or glucose metabolism whereas RXR is activated by retinoic acid,<sup>16,17</sup> which is an intracellular active form of dietary retinol (vitamin A). This is, therefore, a regulatory system in which the physiological response to drug or diet-induced changes would be directly dependent on the availability of vitamin A. In view of the role that this signalling pathway has on the regulation of genes known to be involved in FCHL, we hypothesised that the availability (i.e. concentrations in plasma) of vitamin A could be playing a role in the

expression of FCHL phenotype.

## **Subjects and methods**

### **FCHL subjects**

As part of a larger investigation into the inheritance of FCHL, sixteen families diagnosed as having the disease were identified from the Lipid Clinic of the Hospital Universitari de Sant Joan in Reus (Spain). Diagnosis was based on the index patient having plasma concentrations of cholesterol (chol) and triglycerides (tg)  $\geq 6.4$  mmol/L and/or  $\geq 2.8$  mmol/L, respectively, detected at any time in the clinical history and at least one first-degree relative with a hyperlipidaemic phenotype different from that of the proband. Among these families all those with plasma cholesterol or triglycerides  $\geq 6.4$  mmol/L and  $\geq 2.8$  mmol/L were assigned the FCHL phenotype (n = 30).

Biochemical analyses were conducted to rule out secondary causes of hyperlipidaemia and apo E genotyping was performed to exclude type III hyperlipidemia. Sixteen were on lipid-lowering diets and had been taken off lipid-lowering medication for a period of at least two months when recalled for the study. The rest (n = 14) were identified and recruited before any therapeutic intervention was initiated.

### **Normolipidaemic control subjects**

Fifty six clinically-healthy individuals belonging to 12 normolipidaemic families volunteered to participate and were included as controls in this study. These individuals were recruited from among the clinical and laboratory staff. Subjects undergoing lipid lowering therapy or with secondary causes of hyperlipidaemia were excluded. None of the families met the criteria to be classified as FCHL.

All patients and control subjects recruited into the study gave fully-informed written consent and the protocol was approved by the Scientific and Ethical Committee of the Hospital Universitari de Sant Joan.

### **Analytical methods**

A 10 ml venous blood sample was withdrawn after an overnight fast of 12 hours. One aliquot of the plasma samples was immediately frozen at  $-70^{\circ}\text{C}$  in opaque containers for

plasma retinol and HDL cholesterol or apo A-I concentrations was detected in this group. Conversely, in the FCHL group, positive significant correlation between plasma retinol and HDL cholesterol ( $R = 0.44$ ;  $p=0.01$ ) and apo A-I ( $R = 0.53$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) was observed.

## Discussion

The present report forms part of a wider investigation into the genotypic and phenotypic expression of FCHL. The hypothesis that vitamin A could be involved in the expression of familial combined hyperlipidemia was based on observations which indicated that the increased synthesis and decreased catabolism of VLDL, which is characteristic of FCHL patients, is reverted by the action of fibrate therapy<sup>20,21</sup> the mode of action being the stimulation of the expression of the triglyceride lipase enzyme and repression of the synthesis of its inhibitor, apo C-III.<sup>14-16</sup> Further, this regulatory effect occurs via the PPAR / RXR system which depends on retinoic acid, the intracellular form of plasma vitamin A, being physiologically active.<sup>16,17</sup> Since vitamin A is largely of dietary origin, this aspect could have some significance in the observed variation in the patterns of FCHL expression.

Our results indicating that plasma retinol concentrations were significantly lower in FCHL relative to control subjects are intriguing in that several phenomena associated with FCHL would, now, need to be explored.

Firstly, dietary intake of vitamin A could account for the 50% reduction in the circulating levels of retinol observed in FCHL subjects compared with controls<sup>22,23</sup>. This possibility, however, cannot be the case in the present study since plasma retinol concentrations were no different between those FCHL subjects who were on lipid lowering diet (regularly monitored in the Lipid Clinic) and those who were not. Moreover, preliminary results indicated that vitamin A concentrations were also decreased in normolipidaemic members of FCHL families compared to control subjects (data not shown). These two aspects suggest that low plasma vitamin A concentrations could be more a feature of FCHL rather than a consequence of dietary restriction. Alterations of vitamin A absorption and its binding to RBP<sup>24</sup> could affect the assembly, transport and subsequent hepatic clearance of chylomicrons, the lipoprotein which delivers dietary vitamin A to the liver and which is reported to have a delayed post-prandial clearance in FCHL.<sup>9</sup> *In vivo* lipoprotein kinetics using stable isotopes may help elucidate these aspects.



Secondly, the proposed hypothesis that vitamin A modulates the effect of the PPAR/RXR system on lipoprotein metabolism in response to fibrate or dietary therapy relies on the assumption that intracellular retinoic acid availability is dependent on the plasma concentration of its precursor, vitamin A. In the present study, vitamin A values in the FCHL subjects were not in the range that could be considered as a state of vitamin A deficiency (none of the subjects had plasma vitamin A concentrations below the mean minus two standard deviations of the control values) and, therefore, the extent to which the observed reductions could affect the intracellular availability of retinoic acid needs to be investigated since there is evidence indicating that vitamin A regulates the expression of apo A-I and C-III genes in a tissue specific manner in rats.<sup>25</sup>

Thirdly, controversy exists regarding the closeness of the relationship between retinoids and lipids since, on one hand, hypertriglyceridaemia has been reported to develop as a result of the therapeutic use of retinoids<sup>26</sup> and, on the other hand, epidemiological studies have demonstrated that long-term vitamin A intake does not produce clinically-significant hypertriglyceridemia.<sup>27</sup> Again, *in vivo* lipoprotein kinetics using the recently-developed non-radioactive tracer methodologies in conjunction with *in vitro* testing of this signalling pathway by means of gene expression assays would resolve these questions; studies that are currently under way in our metabolic ward.

In conclusion, the novel observation of low vitamin A concentrations in subjects with FCHL is consistent with our hypothesis that vitamin A could be involved in the pathogenesis of this disorder. The cause of these low vitamin A concentrations requires prompt investigation also because of its reported anti-oxidant and, hence, anti-atherogenic characteristics.

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Table 1. Biometric characteristics of the FCHL and control group of subjects.

	FCHL (n=30)	CONTROL (n=56)
Age	44.1 ± 19.5	40.0 ± 17.2
BMI (Kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	26.9 ± 5.6	24.4 ± 3.8
Gender (M/F)	16/14	26/30

Body mass index (BMI). Gender (Male/Female).

Table 2. Lipid, lipoprotein and apolipoprotein values in the FCHL and Control group of subjects.

	FCHL (n=30)	CONTROL (n=56)
Chol	6.47 ± 0.93#	4.92 ± 0.91
Tg	1.82 ± 0.83#	0.99 ± 0.53
VLDL		
Chol	0.65 ± 0.47#	0.20 ± 0.17
Tg	1.11 ± 0.67#	0.46 ± 0.42
IDL		
Chol	0.38 ± 0.27#	0.15 ± 0.09
Tg	0.24 ± 0.12#	0.12 ± 0.05
LDL		
Chol	4.34 ± 0.87#	3.27 ± 0.76
Tg	0.36 ± 0.13#	0.25 ± 0.08
Total HDL	1.09 ± 0.33	1.32 ± 0.35
HDL <sub>2</sub>	0.17 ± 0.09	0.27 ± 0.15
HDL <sub>3</sub>	0.92 ± 0.28	1.05 ± 0.26
Lp(a)	20.8 ± 17.9	23.0 ± 14.0
Apo A-I	122.3 ± 26.3	121.9 ± 20.4
Apo B	122.1 ± 22.6#	83.7 ± 21.3
Apo C-II	6.6 ± 1.3#	4.7 ± 0.5
Apo C-III	14.5 ± 3.0#	10.9 ± 2.0

Cholesterol and triglycerides in plasma and lipoprotein fractions are expressed as mmol/L.

Lp (a) and apolipoproteins are expressed as mg/dL.

# Significantly different from control.

Table 3. Plasma retinol correlations with lipid and apolipoprotein concentrations.

Group	Chol	Tg	LDLc	HDLc	Apo B	Apo A-I
FCHL	0.15 (NS)	0.12 (NS)	0.05 (NS)	0.44 (p<0.01)	0.20 (NS)	0.53 (p<0.002)
CONTROL	0.38 (P<0.003)	0.23 (P<0.05)	0.32 (P<0.01)	0.004 (NS)	0.42 (p<0.001)	0.22 (NS)

Correlation (R) values adjusted for age, gender and BMI. Statistical significance in brackets.

**Figure 1.**

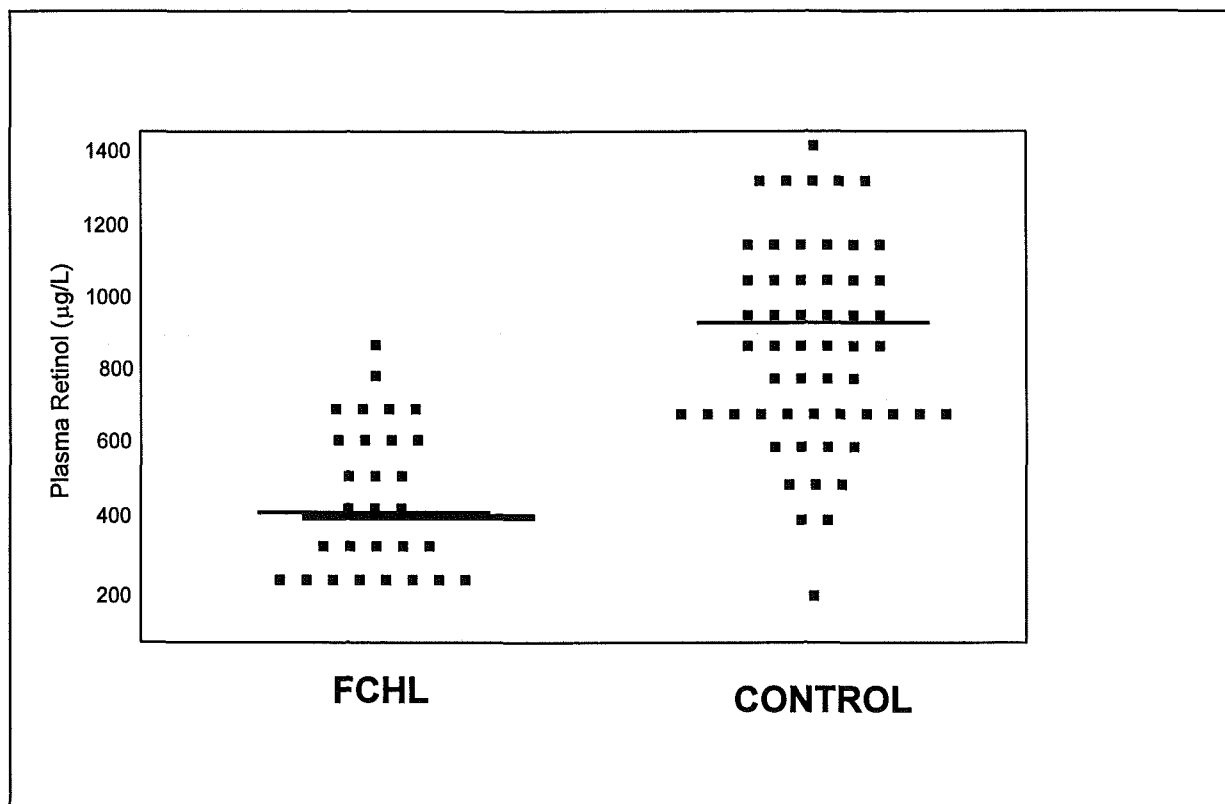


Figure 1

Plasma retinol concentrations in the individual FCHL (n=30) and control subjects (n=56). Horizontal line indicates mean plasma retinol concentrations of each group.



## 4.5. ESTUDI 4

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**Estudi de les lipoproteïnes d'alta densitat i la seva relació amb l'activitat de l'enzim LCAT en pacients amb hiperlipèmia familiar combinada.**

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Ribalta J, La Ville AE, Vallvé JC, Girona J, Masana L.  
*Lecithin :cholesterol acyltransferase activity is not altered in familial combined hyperlipidemia. Atherosclerosis. (En revisió).*

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## **Lecithin:cholesterol acyltransferase (LCAT) activity is not altered in Familial combined hyperlipidemia.**

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### **Abstract**

Elevated concentrations of plasma cholesterol and triglycerides are characteristic of Familial Combined Hyperlipidemia (FCHL) which may also present reduced high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol concentrations. Lecithin:cholesterol acyltransferase (LCAT) plays a key role in the reverse cholesterol transport by converting unesterified cholesterol to cholesterol ester in the process of maturation of HDL and, therefore, could influence HDL metabolism in these patients.

We aimed to study high density lipoproteins and LCAT activity in 25 FCHL subjects and 48 controls. Total HDL ( $p=0.018$ ) and HDL<sub>2</sub> ( $p=0.008$ ) were significantly decreased in the FCHL group compared with controls. After analyses with adjusted data only HDL<sub>2</sub> remained significantly decreased in the FCHL group ( $p=0.050$ ). The LDLc/HDLc and A-I/HDLc ratios were significantly elevated in the FCHL group, the latter suggesting the existence of compositional differences in the HDL particles of the FCHL individuals.

LCAT activity assessed in the FCHL ( $19.94 \pm 3.95$  nmol/ml/h) and control ( $20.13 \pm 6.86$  nmol/ml/h) groups showed no statistically significant differences. A significant positive correlation of LCAT activity with total HDL ( $r=0.42$ ), HDL<sub>3</sub> cholesterol ( $r=0.46$ ) and apolipoprotein A-I ( $r=0.47$ ) was observed in affected subjects but not in controls.

An association between a G<sub>-76</sub>-A variation in the promoter region of the apo A-I gene and elevated concentrations of total HDL cholesterol ( $p=0.052$ ) and apo A-I ( $p=0.009$ ) was observed. This association was strongly influenced by the status of the subject (FCHL or control) providing further evidence for a regulatory role of this genetic region in the expression of FCHL.

Our data suggests that LCAT activity is normal in FCHL and, therefore, does not account for the abnormalities observed in these patients essentially with regard to the HDL<sub>2</sub> subfraction.

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## Introduction

Familial combined hyperlipidemia (FCHL) is the commonest genetic form of hyperlipidemia among survivors of premature myocardial infarction (10-20%) with an estimated prevalence of 0.5-2% in the general population [1,2]. Family studies are necessary to diagnose FCHL in an individual patient since the FCHL phenotype may vary among family members and, over a temporal sequence, even in the individual patient, with hypercholesterolemia, hypertriglyceridemia, or both, being expressed [3,4]. Increased flux of apolipoprotein (apo) B of very low density lipoprotein (VLDL) and decreased catabolism of VLDL and intermediate density lipoproteins (IDL) have been reported in these patients [5-8]. Increase of small dense low density lipoproteins (LDL) [9,10] and impaired lipoprotein lipase (LPL) activity [11,12] are also features associated with the FCHL phenotype in a subset of patients.

Low concentrations of high density lipoprotein (HDL) have been reported in relation to FCHL [4,13,14] and could account for the increased risk of coronary artery disease (CAD) associated with this disorder [15,16]. If these reductions can be considered a specific characteristic of these patients remains to be elucidated since factors of a either metabolic (hypertriglyceridemia, insulin resistance, menopause) [17-19], environmental (smoking, physical exercise) [20,21] or genetic (apo E genotype) [22] nature may partially explain these reductions. Conversely, several reports suggest that key proteins involved in reverse cholesterol transport, such as, Lecithin :cholesterol acyltransferase (LCAT) and cholesterol ester transfer protein (CETP) might be altered in these patients [23,24]. LCAT converts unesterified cholesterol to cholesterol ester in the process of maturation of HDL [25,26] whereas CETP exchanges neutral lipids between triglyceride-rich lipoproteins and HDL [27]. While CETP has been reported to have increased activity in patients with combined hyperlipidemia [24], the potential role of LCAT in FCHL has been pointed out in animal studies [23] but remains to be clarified in humans. More precisely, familial hypercholesterolemic swine, which resemble FCHL, present elevations in HDL cholesterol in response to drug treatment which are accompanied of increased LCAT activity.

The fact that the gene encoding for apo A-I, the activator of LCAT, is located in the AI-CIII-AIV gene cluster to which extensive data links to the aetiology of FCHL [28-30], further supports a potential role of LCAT in the expression of FCHL.

We aimed to study high density lipoproteins and LCAT activity in subjects with familial combined hyperlipidemia and also its relation with a polymorphism in the promoter region of the apo A-I gene in order to investigate a potential genetic component underlying the reverse

transport of cholesterol in FCHL.

## **Subjects and methods**

All subjects recruited into the study gave fully-informed written consent and the protocol was approved by the Scientific and Ethical Committee of the Hospital Universitari de Sant Joan.

### **FCHL families**

Nine index patients diagnosed as having FCHL were recruited from the Lipid Clinic of the Hospital Universitari de Sant Joan in Reus (Spain). Diagnosis was based on the subject having plasma concentrations of cholesterol (chol) and triglycerides (trig)  $\geq 6.4$  mmol/L and  $\geq 2.8$  mmol/L, respectively, detected at any time in the clinical history and at least one first degree relative with a hyperlipidemic phenotype different from that of the proband. Mean plasma cholesterol and triglyceride values of index subjects during selection were  $7.5 \pm 0.9$  and  $4.5 \pm 1.5$  mmol/l, respectively.

Biochemical analyses were conducted to rule out secondary causes of hyperlipidemia and apo E genotyping was performed to exclude type III hyperlipidemia. All index subjects were on a lipid lowering diet and had been taken off lipid lowering medication for a period of at least two months when recalled for the study. All available family members of index patients with plasma cholesterol concentrations  $\geq 6.4$  mmol/L and/or plasma triglycerides  $\geq 2.8$  mmol/L or elevated above the 95th percentile for age and gender were assigned the FCHL phenotype (n=16). The FCHL group totalled with the index subjects 25 individuals .

### **Normolipidemic control families**

Forty eight individuals belonging to 12 normolipidemic families volunteered to participate and were included as controls in this study. The families were from among the clinical and laboratory staff. Subjects undergoing lipid lowering therapy or with secondary causes of hyperlipidemia were excluded. None of the families met the criteria to be classified as FCHL.

### **Analytical methods**

A 10 ml venous blood sample was withdrawn after an overnight fast of 12 hours. Triglycerides and cholesterol in plasma and lipoprotein fractions were measured using enzymatic kits (Boehringer Mannheim, Germany) adapted for a Cobas Mira analyzer (Roche Pharmaceuticals, Switzerland) with Precilip EL<sup>®</sup> and Precinorm<sup>®</sup> (Boehringer Mannheim, Germany) as quality controls. Immuno-turbidometry was employed for the measurement of the apolipoproteins using specific antiserum purchased from Boehringer Mannheim, Germany (for apo A-I and apo B), Daiichi Chemicals, Japan (for apo C-II and apo C-III) and Incstar Corporation, U.S.A (for Lp(a)).

### **Sequential preparative ultracentrifugation**

Lipoproteins were separated by sequential preparative ultracentrifugation [31], using a Kontron 45.6 fixed-angle rotor in a Centrikon 1075 (Kontron Instruments, Italy). The lipoprotein fractions isolated were VLDL ( $d < 1.006$  g/ml), IDL ( $d = 1.006-1.019$  g/ml) and LDL ( $d = 1.019-1.063$  g/ml). Total HDL and HDL3 cholesterol were measured subsequent to the precipitation of the apo B-containing lipoproteins with polyethylene glycol (Immuno AG, Austria). HDL2 cholesterol was calculated from the difference between total HDL and HDL3 cholesterol.

### **LCAT activity assay**

LCAT activity was assessed using the liposome substrate prepared according to Albers et al [32]. The reaction was initiated by mixing 15  $\mu$ L of plasma and 100  $\mu$ L of the substrate. Samples were incubated for 30 minutes at 37°C and the reaction stopped by addition of 2 ml of ethanol. LCAT was extracted into hexane and the hexane phase was evaporated under nitrogen, and the free and esterified cholesterol fractions were separated by thin layer chromatography. The cholesterol ester bands were visualized with rhodamine scraped from the plates and put into liquid scintillation fluid for beta counting. LCAT activity is expressed as nmol cholesterol esterified/ml/hour.

### **DNA analyses**

DNA was extracted from an aliquot of frozen white cells by the salting out method [33]. PCR [34] was carried out to amplify the region containing the G<sub>-75</sub>-A substitution. The

reaction mixture (50  $\mu$ L) for amplification contained 250 ng of each of the two primers (Boehringer Mannheim, Germany), 5' primer, 5'-AGGGACAGAGCTGATCCTTGAACCTCTTAAG-3' and 3' primer, 5'-TTAGGGGACACCTAGCCCTCAGGAAGAGCA-3', 200 ng of genomic DNA and 1 U of Taq polymerase (Boehringer Mannheim, Germany). Magnesium concentration in the reaction buffer was 1.5 mM. The reactions were performed on a Hybaid Omnigene thermocycler at 95°C for 5 min, 55°C for 1 min and 72°C for 2 min followed by 35 cycles of 95°C for 1 min, 55 °C for 1 min and 72°C for 2 min. Twenty microliters of PCR product were digested overnight with 9 U of the restriction enzyme *MspI* (Boehringer Mannheim) in a total volume of 30  $\mu$ L using the buffer recommended by the manufacturer. The DNA fragments were separated by electrophoresis on 2% agarose gels.

Digestion with *MspI* results in four fragments of 48, 67, 110 and 207 bp. In the absence of the *MspI* cutting site three fragments of 48, 177 and 207 bp are produced [35].

### Statistical Analyses

The  $\chi^2$  test was used to compare the frequency of the  $A_{.75}$  genotypes (GA/AA) among groups. The Z test for comparison of proportions was used to compare allele frequencies. ANOVA was performed to compare the means of the lipid and LCAT activity adjusted data and  $\log_{10}$  transformed when the variables were not normally distributed. Deviation from Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium was tested with the  $\chi^2$  goodness-of-fit test. Results are expressed as means  $\pm$  standard deviations. Statistical significance was accepted at the 0.05 level.

### Results

According to the criteria mentioned above, the population of study was divided in two groups. Those subjects belonging to FCHL families expressing the FCHL phenotype (*FCHL*; n=25) and a group of healthy controls (*controls*; n=48). Biometric data of the two groups is summarised in table 1. The two groups were comparable with relation to age and gender distribution. The percentage of cigarette smokers (26% and 33%, respectively) and premenopausal women (71% and 83%, respectively) in FCHL subjects and controls was not

significantly different. The BMI was elevated in the FCHL group relative to controls ( $p=0.035$ )

### **Lipoproteins and apolipoproteins**

In the affected group 13 subjects with hypercholesterolemia alone, 4 subjects with hypertriglyceridemia alone and 8 subjects presenting both, were identified. Plasma concentrations of lipoproteins related to peripheral lipid transport (VLDL, IDL and LDL) (Table 2) and to reverse cholesterol transport (total HDL, HDL2 and HDL3) (table 3) were studied in the two groups. Cholesterol and triglycerides in plasma, VLDL, IDL and LDL together with apolipoproteins B, C-II and C-III were significantly elevated among FCHL subjects compared with control individuals.

In relation to HDL metabolism, total HDL ( $p=0.018$ ) and HDL2 ( $p=0.008$ ) cholesterol concentrations were decreased among FCHL subjects. After ANOVA analyses on data adjusted for age, gender, BMI and fasting plasma triglycerides only differences regarding the HDL2 fraction remained significant ( $p=0.050$ ). Significantly elevated values for the apo A-I/HDLc ( $p<0.0001$ ) and LDLc/HDLc ( $p<0.0001$ ) ratios were observed in the FCHL group compared with controls.

### **LCAT activity**

LCAT activity was determined in FCHL and control subjects. ANOVA analyses on adjusted data did not show any difference between groups regarding LCAT activity (table 4). Significant differences between groups were observed with the correlation of LCAT activity with apo A-I and HDL cholesterol concentrations. Statistically significant correlation ( $r$ ) values of 0.47, 0.42 and 0.46 were obtained with LCAT activity and apo A-I, total HDL and HDL3, respectively, in the FCHL group. LCAT activity significantly correlated only with HDL2 ( $r=0.27$ ) in controls.

### **G<sub>-75</sub>-A polymorphism in the promoter of the apo A-I gene**

The observed frequencies of the GG, GA and AA genotypes in the two groups were not different from those predicted by the Hardy-Weinberg distribution. The genotype (GA+AA) (0.37 vs 0.27) and allele frequencies (0.21 vs 0.13) in the FCHL and control groups were not significantly different.

The effect of the A<sub>-75</sub> allele on lipids, lipoproteins and apolipoproteins was studied.

IDL cholesterol ( $p=0.032$ ), apo C-III ( $p=0.041$ ) and apo A-I ( $p=0.009$ ) were significantly elevated in subjects carrying the  $A_{75}$  allele. Total HDL showed elevations in the  $A_{75}$  which almost reached statistical significance ( $p=0.052$ ). Genotype-status interaction was investigated by means of an ANOVA model showing that the relationship between this polymorphism and triglyceride-rich lipoproteins was significantly modified by the status of the subject (FCHL or controls). This interaction was also found to affect total HDL and apo A-I.

LCAT activity was also studied in relation with the G-A substitution of the apo A-I gene. LCAT activity in subjects with the GG genotype ( $19.83 \pm 6.97$  nmol/ml/hour) was almost identical to that of the A allele carriers ( $19.51 \pm 3.90$  nmol/ml/hour). No significant genotype-status interaction was detected with regard to the activity of the enzyme.

## Discussion

The population studied had unusually normal mean plasma triglyceride concentrations for a FCHL group when recruited for the study and this is for two reasons. First, the presence of several FCHL subjects with plasma triglyceride concentrations above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for age and gender although not necessarily meaning above 2.8 mmol/l, the cut-off point value for an adult FCHL patient. Second, a clear over-representation of isolated hypercholesterolemia ( $n=13$ ) versus isolated hypertriglyceridemia ( $n=4$ ). Given the well known effect that hypertriglyceridemia has on HDL metabolism, this group of subjects seemed to be an appropriate sample to explore any possible alteration of HDL related to FCHL, minimising the effect of hypertriglyceridemia.

Concentrations of HDL cholesterol might be reduced in FCHL [4,13,14]. However, before this can be considered a specific characteristic of FCHL, several aspects should be taken into account. The diversity of lipoprotein phenotypes present among FCHL subjects, as well as, a number of factors such as high fasting plasma triglycerides, cigarette smoking, alcohol intake or physical exercise [17-22] can account for the low levels of HDL observed in these subjects. Our results confirm this point by showing that the reductions in total HDL and HDL3 among FCHL subjects are essentially explained by their age, gender, BMI and plasma triglycerides. However, HDL2 cholesterol concentrations are significantly reduced in this group and this is consistent with the data of Brunzell and co-workers [4] indicating that reductions in HDL mostly affect the HDL2 fraction in FCHL.



The increased LDLc/HDLc and A-I/HDLc ratios observed in the FCHL group compared with controls remained significant in all the cases. While the former is most likely a consequence of the reported hepatic overproduction of VLDL and, to a lesser extent, of LDL [7], the understanding of the latter might be of importance. Assuming that apo A-I is almost completely contained in the HDL fraction, an elevated A-I/HDLc ratio suggests the existence of some alterations in the composition of the HDL particles. Whether these alterations might result in less efficient reverse cholesterol transport which could, subsequently, contribute to the increased risk of CAD associated with FCHL, remains to be elucidated. Should it be so, those proteins involved in the modelling of HDL particles, LCAT and CETP, could play a role in this process. While CETP has recently been reported to have an increased activity in patients with combined hyperlipidemia [24], LCAT has not been studied in much detail in relation to FCHL.

To clarify whether LCAT could play a role in the regulation of HDL cholesterol in these patients, its activity was assessed *in vitro* in the both groups of study. Our results showed that LCAT activity was the same in FCHL or control subjects, indicating that a defective form of the enzyme associated with FCHL ought to be discarded. However, since the ability of LCAT to esterify cholesterol is assessed, *in vitro*, using an artificial substrate [32], a defective function of the enzyme, *in vivo*, due to the specific composition of the HDL particles of these patients should not be ruled out. This possibility is strengthened by several studies which indicate that the phospholipid or apolipoprotein composition of HDL might have an important effect on LCAT activity [37,38]. Further studies of LCAT activity *in vivo* in these patients should be made in order to clarify this point.

Of interest is also the markedly different correlation between LCAT activity and HDL parameters in FCHL and control subjects. A positive significant correlation of LCAT with apo A-I, total HDL and HDL3 was observed in FCHL subjects but not in controls. This could suggest that HDL cholesterol concentrations are more importantly influenced by LCAT in those subjects with a hyperlipidemic profile.

A potential genetic component underlying the observed differences was assessed by studying a G<sub>-75</sub>A substitution in the promoter region of the apo A-I gene [35]. Apo A-I, the major protein component of HDL and the activator of LCAT, is encoded in the AI-CIII-AIV gene cluster to which extensive data link to FCHL [28-30]. This variation showed to be associated with elevations in IDL cholesterol and apolipoproteins A-I and C-III. Interestingly, the associations between this polymorphism and parameters related to triglyceride-rich

metabolism were found to be significantly different in FCHL and control subjects. This genotype-status interaction confirms previous observations by our group [39] and supports the reported regulatory role of the AI-CIII-AIV gene cluster in FCHL [30].

We conclude that LCAT enzyme is normal in FCHL and, therefore, does not account for the abnormalities observed in these patients essentially with regard to the HDL2 subfraction.

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Table 1. Biometric characteristics

	FCHL	CONTROL
Number	25	48
Age	41.3 ± 21.1	40.9 ± 18.1
Gender (M/F)	14/11	23/25
BMI (Kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	26.1 ± 5.4 <sup>a</sup>	24.4 ± 3.7
Diastolic BP	77 ± 16	78 ± 14
Systolic BP	128 ± 24	125 ± 20

<sup>a</sup> Significantly different from controls ; p=0.035. Gender Male/Female.



Table 2. Lipids and apolipoproteins related to VLDL, IDL and LDL.

Variable	FCHL (n=25)	CONTROLS (n=48)
Plasma Chol	6.30 ± 1.01 <sup>a</sup>	5.04 ± 1.04
Plasma Trig	1.79 ± 0.65 <sup>a</sup>	1.07 ± 0.65
VLDL		
Chol	0.63 ± 0.47 <sup>a</sup>	0.23 ± 0.21
Trig	1.11 ± 0.70 <sup>a</sup>	0.50 ± 0.50
IDL		
Chol	0.36 ± 0.27 <sup>a</sup>	0.17 ± 0.13
Trig	0.23 ± 0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.12 ± 0.06
LDL		
Chol	4.24 ± 0.89 <sup>a</sup>	3.39 ± 0.84
Trig	0.35 ± 0.13 <sup>a</sup>	0.26 ± 0.10
Lp(a)	20.6 ± 17.4	20.9 ± 13.4
Plasma apo B	118.0 ± 25.7 <sup>a</sup>	88.3 ± 25.2
Plasma apo C-II	6.54 ± 1.28 <sup>a</sup>	4.65 ± 0.48
Plasma apo C-III	14.7 ± 4.52 <sup>a</sup>	10.8 ± 1.90

<sup>a</sup> Significantly different from controls p<0.0001

Statistical differences assessed by ANOVA with data adjusted for BMI, gender and age.

Cholesterol and triglycerides are expressed in mmol/L. Apolipoproteins and Lp(a) are expressed in mg/dl.

Table 3. Lipids and apolipoproteins related to HDL metabolism.

Variable	FCHL (n=25)	CONTROL (n=48)	p <sup>a</sup> =	p <sup>b</sup> =
Total HDL	1.12 ± 0.35	1.28 ± 0.30	0.018	NS
HDL <sub>2</sub>	0.17 ± 0.10	0.24 ± 0.15	0.008	0.050
HDL <sub>3</sub>	0.95 ± 0.30	1.03 ± 0.23	NS	NS
Plasma apo A-I	123.6 ± 25.8	120.6 ± 19.2	NS	NS
A-I / HDLc	115.5 ± 20.0	97.2 ± 13.6	0.0001	0.014
LDLc / HDLc	4.15 ± 1.47	2.78 ± 0.88	0.0001	0.001

p<sup>a</sup>= statistical significance with unadjusted data.

P<sup>b</sup>= statistical significance for ANOVA with data adjusted for age, BMI, gender and fasting plasma triglycerides.

HDLc = HDL cholesterol ; LDLc = LDL cholesterol

Table 4. LCAT activity and correlation with apo A-I and HDL parameters in FCHL and control subjects.

	FCHL (n=25)	CONTROL (n=48)
LCAT activity	19.94 ± 3.95	20.13 ± 6.86
Correlation		
Apo A-I	r=0.47 (p=0.027)	r=0.01 (NS)
Total HDL	r=0.42 (p=0.047)	r=-0.01 (NS)
HDL2	r=0.12 (NS)	r=0.27 (p=0.040)
HDL3	r=0.46 (p=0.030)	r=-0.19 (NS)
A-I/HDLc	r=-0.16 (NS)	r=-0.02 (NS)
LDLc/HDLc	r=-0.21 (NS)	r=-0.23 (NS)

LCAT activity is expressed in nmol cholesterol esterified/ml/hour.

Values of LCAT activity and correlation with HDL parameters obtained from data adjusted for age, gender and BMI.

Table 5. Lipids and apolipoproteins related to VLDL, IDL and LDL based on genotype.

	GG	GA/AA	p=	Status interaction
Number	49	24		
Plasma Chol	5.40 ± 1.10	6.02 ± 1.28	NS	NS
Plasma Trig	1.29 ± 0.78	1.59 ± 0.90	NS	0.007
VLDL				
Chol	0.34 ± 0.30	0.54 ± 0.53	NS	0.0001
Trig	0.69 ± 0.80	0.93 ± 0.76	NS	0.002
IDL				
Chol	0.20 ± 0.14	0.35 ± 0.31	0.032	0.007
Trig	0.15 ± 0.08	0.21 ± 0.13	NS	0.009
LDL				
Chol	3.69 ± 0.99	3.95 ± 0.89	NS	NS
Trig	0.28 ± 0.12	0.33 ± 0.11	NS	NS
Lp(a)	20.21 ± 15.24	21.32 ± 15.56	NS	NS
Plasma apo B	97.4 ± 28.0	110.5 ± 29.7	NS	0.033
Plasma apo C-II	5.28 ± 1.11	5.87 ± 1.60	NS	0.006
Plasma apo C-III	11.9 ± 2.4	14.1 ± 5.5	0.041	0.0001

Statistical differences assessed by ANOVA with data adjusted for BMI, gender and age. Cholesterol and triglycerides are expressed in mmol/L. Apolipoproteins and Lp(a) are expressed in mg/dl. Status interaction indicates a significant effect of being a FCHL subject on the association between the polymorphism and lipid parameters.

Table 6. Lipids and apolipoproteins related to HDL based on genotype.

	GG	GA/AA	p=	Status interaction
Number	49	24		
Total HDL	1.19 ± 0.35	1.24 ± 0.29	0.052	0.029
HDL <sub>2</sub>	0.21 ± 0.15	0.23 ± 0.09	NS	NS
HDL <sub>3</sub>	0.99 ± 0.27	1.01 ± 0.25	0.083	NS
Plasma apo A-I	118.1 ± 18.3	129 ± 27.2	0.009	0.001
A-I / HDLc	104.0 ± 19.4	107.4 ± 18.4	NS	NS
LDLc / HDLc	3.41 ± 1.45	3.35 ± 1.10	NS	NS

HDL cholesterol expressed as mmol/l. Apo A-I expressed as mg/dl. Statistical differences assessed by ANOVA with data adjusted for age, BMI, gender and fasting plasma triglycerides.. Status interaction indicates a significant effect of being a FCHL subject on the association between the polymorphism and lipid parameters.

HDLc = HDL cholesterol ; LDLc = LDL cholesterol

## 4.6. Resum dels resultats

- La freqüència d'individus portadors del polimorfisme C<sub>1100</sub>-T del gen de l'apolipoproteïna C-III és més elevada en pacients HLFC (64%) que en controls (36%).
- Els portadors del polimorfisme C<sub>1100</sub>-T tenen concentracions més elevades de triglicèrids plasmàtics, de colesterol, triglicèrids i apo B en VLDL i IDL, i d'apo C-III.
- L' associació entre el polimorfisme C<sub>1100</sub>-T i els esmentats paràmetres lipídics només es detecta en els individus HLFC.
- Les concentracions plasmàtiques de retinol són més baixes en individus HLFC que en controls (418.9 vs 888.9 µg/L). Aquestes diferències no són degudes a factors dietètics.
- L'activitat *in vitro* de l'enzim LCAT no és diferent entre pacients HLFC i controls.
- La concentració de colesterol en la fracció HDL2 és més baixa en els pacients HLFC tot i que aquesta diferència està al límit de la significació estadística.
- El polimorfisme G<sub>-75</sub>-A del gen de l'apolipoproteïna A-I està associat a concentracions més elevades d'apo A-I, apo C-III i colesterol de la fracció IDL.
- La prevalença d'hiperlipèmia entre descendents menors de 19 anys de pacients HLFC és del 43%. Aquests, a diferència dels individus adults, no presenten alteracions en la fracció IDL.
- La determinació de la isoforma de l'apolipoproteïna E a partir del fenotip suposa un 6% d'error respecte del genotip.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS GLOBALS**

## 5. Conclusions globals

- Les associacions dels polimorfismes C<sub>1100</sub>-T (apo C-III) i G<sub>-75</sub>-A (apo A-I) amb els triglicèrids plasmàtics, les fraccions VLDL i IDL i l'apolipoproteïna C-III, suggereixen la presència en la regió de l'agregat AI-CIII-AIV d'una **mutació funcional** amb un efecte clar sobre el metabolisme dels triglicèrids. L'elevada prevalença del polimorfisme C<sub>1100</sub>-T entre els pacients HLFC també suggereix que aquesta **mutació funcional** pot estar implicada en l'etiopatogènia d'aquesta alteració.
- Les associacions entre aquests polimorfismes i els paràmetres lipídics són diferents entre pacients i controls. Això fa pensar que aquesta hipotètica **mutació funcional** estaria altament modulada per factors metabòlics o ambientals i que actuaria com un **factor de predisposició** en aquests pacients.
- L'associació del polimorfisme C<sub>1100</sub>-T amb un major nombre de partícules VLDL i IDL, però no amb un augment dels nivells plasmàtics totals d'apo B, fa pensar que aquests pacients podrien tenir un catabolisme deficient d'aquestes partícules amb una base genètica, possiblement lligada a un augment en la síntesi d'apo C-III.
- La hipòtesi que els mecanismes de regulació gènica depenents d'àcid retinoic poden estar involucrats en la HLFC es veu recolzada per les baixes concentracions plasmàtiques de vitamina A que aquests pacients presenten respecte dels controls. Aquests baixos nivells de vitamina A no són deguts a factors dietètics i podrien tractar-se d'una característica específica d'aquests pacients.
- En pacients HLFC no es pot parlar d'una clara disminució de les concentracions de colesterol en les lipoproteïnes d'alta densitat tot i que aquestes tendeixen a estar disminuïdes.
- Els pacients HLFC tenen una activitat LCAT *in vitro* normal. Això descarta la presència d'una forma defectuosa de l'enzim associada a aquesta patologia, però no descarta un



funcionament anormal *in vivo* degut a les característiques específiques de les lipoproteïnes d'aquests individus.

- En les famílies HLFC, la prevalença d'hiperlipèmia entre descendents menors de 19 anys és de prop del 50%, tal com caldria esperar en una alteració de transmissió autosòmica dominant. A més, aquests resultats confirmen la possibilitat de detectar de manera precoç aquests individus per a fer-ne un seguiment preventiu. L'absència d'alteracions en la fracció IDL suggereix que aquestes poden estar involucrades en l'evolució d'aquesta malaltia.
- D'entre els diferents mètodes de determinar la isoforma de l'apolipoproteïna E és més fiable i senzill determinar el genotip que el fenotip.

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