

MEDIA RELEASE

UNDER EMBARGO until 6AM Wednesday 21st September 2016

No beer or burgers but fasting for cholesterol tests could soon be history

Medical scientists have declared that many patients may no longer need to go without food for 8 to 12 hours before cholesterol testing. *

Chemical Pathologist, Professor Graham Jones is an ambassador for Pathology Awareness Australia (PAA). He said, "This is good news for patients and doctors. There is sufficient evidence that non-fasting tests are just as good at predicting cardiovascular risk so it makes sense that testing be made more convenient for patients."

The change is likely to be officially recognized in Australian guidelines at some point next year, although some laboratories and doctors are already accepting non-fasting samples for lipid testing.

There will however be some patients where a fasting sample is still preferred.

These changes relate to lipid tests such as cholesterol, sub-fractions of cholesterol, and triglycerides.

More than 2 million cholesterol tests were performed in Australia in 2015-16. Results of these tests are used to measure a person's risk of heart disease and monitor various therapies.

Under current guidelines, patients referred for lipid testing must go without food for 8-12 hours and shouldn't drink anything but water before having their blood taken.

The inconvenience and discomfort of fasting means that many people miss their test or delay testing.

The fasting requirement can also place a burden on pathology collection centres during morning hours, as many patients find it easiest to get tested before breakfast, creating crowded waiting rooms.

Frustration can also arise where patients are unaware of the need to fast and present for their test after eating as normal, to discover they must return another day. Fasting can also affect the balance of glucose-lowering medicines in diabetes.

UK guidelines already endorse the use of non-fasting lipid profiles and a consensus statement released in April this year in the European Heart Journal¹ (EHJ) also recommended the use of non-fasting tests.

As most people would usually have just a couple of hours between meals, the EHJ article also suggests that non-fasting tests could be seen as preferable, with the results being more reflective of the patient's usual status.

A specialist in this area, A/Prof David Sullivan from the University of Sydney commented; "Recent work is showing that using non-fasting triglycerides (fats) testing improves our ability to find people at risk of heart disease."

The Know Pathology Know Healthcare initiative run by PAA seeks to raise awareness of the vital role of pathology in healthcare. Seventy percent of medical decisions rely on pathology results and so it is essential that patients understand the importance of having tests recommended by their doctor.

Lipid profile results help doctors to predict a person's cardiovascular risk and also to monitor patients who have conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

"We already know that a percentage of people don't present for pathology tests when a doctor requests them and so it's important that we remove barriers to testing where possible. There are still circumstances where someone may be required to fast before a lipids test but for most patients, non-fasting tests will be appropriate," said A/Prof Jones.

"However, fasting remains the preferred sample for some other tests such as plasma glucose for diabetes assessment."

Drinking alcohol and eating high fat foods, including fast foods, may have a more marked effect on results, so it is recommended that these be avoided on the day of testing.

ENDS

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Associate Professor David Sullivan is available for interview

Associate Professor Graham Jones is available for interview

**As discussed at the Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists 5th Harmonisation meeting on Monday 12th September 2016*

Ref:

¹ Eur Heart J. 2016 Jul 1;37(25):1944-58. doi: 10.1093/eurheartj/ehw152. Epub 2016 Apr 26.

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 European Atherosclerosis Society and European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27122601>

Know Pathology Know Healthcare (www.knowpathology.com.au)

Know Pathology Know Healthcare is funded by Pathology Awareness Australia Limited. Launched in June 2014, this initiative strives to educate the Australian public about how pathology tests benefit personal healthcare and showcase the world class pathology services Australians access.

Pathology Awareness Australia Limited

The Know Pathology Know Healthcare initiative is managed by Pathology Awareness Australia which is a not-for-profit company formed to improve understanding and recognition of Australia's world class pathology services. The company represents 95% of the Australian pathology

landscape and comprises the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, private pathology groups, public pathology groups, and manufacturers and suppliers to industry.