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Commentary

Lipid Biomarkers: Disease Mechanisms and Diagnostic Potential

Anastasia Golubova*

Department of Metabolomics and Lipidomics, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

DESCRIPTION

Lipid biomarkers are molecules derived from lipids fatty acids, phospholipids, sphingolipids and other lipid classes that serve as indicators of physiological states, disease progression, or therapeutic efficacy. These biomarkers provide critical insights into various biological processes, including metabolism, inflammation, cardiovascular health, cancer, neurodegenerative diseases and metabolic disorders. As key mediators of cell signaling, energy storage and membrane structure, lipids are important to cellular function. Their altered levels, composition, or metabolism often reflect underlying pathophysiological conditions, making lipid biomarkers powerful tools in diagnostic and prognostic applications.

The role of lipids in the body

Lipids are diverse molecules that play important roles in cellular and physiological processes. They include:

Fatty acids: Basic building blocks of lipids, involved in energy storage, membrane structure and signaling.

Phospholipids: Major components of cell membranes, regulating cell signaling and intracellular communication.

Sphingolipids: Involved in signaling pathways, cellular recognition and apoptosis regulation.

Sterols: Such as cholesterol, which is vital for membrane integrity and precursor to steroid hormones.

These lipids are involved in various significant functions, including energy storage, hormone production, inflammation modulation and neural transmission. Their role in cellular signaling means that changes in lipid profiles can serve as early warning signs for disease, making lipidomics-the study of lipid profiles in biological systems-a growing field in medical studies and diagnostics.

Lipid biomarkers

Lipid biomarkers can be classified based on their lipid classes, pathways and their association with particular diseases. Some of the most studied lipid biomarkers include:

Eicosanoids: Eicosanoids are bioactive lipids derived from arachidonic acid and other polyunsaturated fatty acids. They include prostaglandins, leukotrienes, thromboxanes and lipoxins. Eicosanoids are involved in inflammation, immune response and tissue repair. Abnormal eicosanoid production is associated with inflammatory conditions such as arthritis, cardiovascular disease and asthma.

Sphingolipids: Sphingolipids, including ceramide and sphingosine-1-phosphate, are involved in cell growth, apoptosis and inflammatory responses. Altered levels of these lipids are linked to various conditions, including neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's disease, cancers and cardiovascular disorders.

Steroids: Steroid hormones, derived from cholesterol, include cortisol, estrogen, testosterone and aldosterone, which regulate metabolism, immune function and reproduction. Cholesterol levels and its metabolites serve as biomarkers for cardiovascular health, as elevated cholesterol is a risk factor for atherosclerosis and heart disease.

Cholesterol and its derivatives: Elevated or decreased cholesterol levels in blood are important biomarkers in diagnosing and predicting cardiovascular disease.

Fatty acids and their derivatives: Free fatty acids (FFAs), such as palmitic acid and oleic acid, serve as important biomarkers for metabolic diseases, including diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome. Distinct patterns of fatty acid profiles can reflect lipid imbalances and provide insights into underlying metabolic dysfunctions.

Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids: These fatty acids are implicated in inflammatory processes. Their ratios can indicate the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer.

Lipidomics and technology advancements

Recent advancements in lipidomics, the study of the complete lipid profile of biological samples, have significantly enhanced the identification and quantification of lipid biomarkers. Techniques such as Mass Spectrometry (MS) and Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS) allow for the high-

Correspondence to: Anastasia Golubova, Department of Metabolomics and Lipidomics, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, Email: golubova.g@uc.uk

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throughput analysis of lipids in blood, tissues and cells. These technologies enable scientists to identify new lipid biomarkers, study their role in disease processes and develop personalized therapeutic strategies.