

CHEMICAL DIAGNOSIS OF DISEASE

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Preface

Some four years ago, the Editors canvassed opinion in several countries as to the need for an authoritative book on the interpretative aspects of clinical chemistry tests. It was felt that several detailed volumes on methodology were available, but similar depth of coverage of interpretation was incomplete or somewhat dated. All the individuals who were approached agreed on the value of an endeavour to gather together comprehensive surveys by authorities in all branches of the subject.

In seeking potential authors, we asked both physicians who were often faced with the problem of differential diagnosis of diseases and laboratory scientists who were commonly presented with isolated abnormal test values, to discuss the choice of tests and the interpretation of results from their different perspectives. Inevitably, this led to a certain measure of overlap, yet we felt that a dual approach was essential to provide adequate coverage of many different topics. We are grateful to the authors for minimizing duplication, but yet at the same time achieving thorough coverage of their own subjects. Strong efforts have been made not to overlook topics of actual or potential importance, but we would be grateful if readers could draw our attention to areas which they feel have been inadequately covered.

So far as possible, the material of each chapter has been organized in a uniformly systematic way, but the authors have been encouraged to adopt their own individual styles within this framework. Many of the chapters, and in some instances subsections of chapters, have been the subject of distinct monographs; and it has been essential to be highly selective. Undoubtedly on occasion the selection has been biased by the particular interests of the editors or the author concerned. However, a general attempt has been made to concentrate on the areas of major clinical importance; details of methodology have only been incorporated when they have an immediate bearing on the clinical interpretation of results. On matters over which there is still room for debate, authors have been aware in many instances of a need to cut corners by the use of dogmatic statements. This has been necessary to avoid a review format which attempts to mention all points of view and decide nothing.

Since the chapters have been written over a period during which moves towards the *Système Internationale d'Unités* have taken place, or are being considered in many countries, we have felt compelled to use both SI and traditional units throughout the book. An attempt has been made to implement many of the latest recommendations on nomenclature, and it is perhaps not surprising that problems have been encountered which may not have been appreciated by those making the recommendations.

In the past, it has sometimes been necessary to make clinical interpretations of results which were obtained by very dubious methodologies. Modern technology has rendered many of these interpretations obsolete and attention has been drawn to certain instances where the lack of specificity of an assay is likely to render the clinical interpretation of a result difficult or confusing.

It may be said by some that the title of the book should have incorporated the term "clinical chemistry", and indeed the book does concern a major aspect of this subject. Various definitions of clinical chemistry — or chemical pathology — have been proposed (IFCC Newsletters, Nos. 6–10, 1971–1974) which indicate three main divisions: analytical, fundamental research into the biochemistry of health and disease (in some countries termed clinical biochemistry), and the interpretation of results. It is this last — neglected — facet which is dealt with here. However, we hope that our readership will include both clinicians and laboratory scientists; the title of the book was chosen to emphasize that the interpretative role of clinical chemistry covers an area where clinicians and biochemists meet on common ground.

July 1979

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Contents

Preface	v
List of affiliations	vii
CHAPTER 1: BIOLOGICAL VARIABILITY	
Donald S. Young	1
1.1. Introduction	3
1.2. Genetic influences	7
1.3. Long-term physiological influences	8
1.4. Short-term physiological influences	44
1.5. Drug administration	75
1.6. General physiological responses	86
1.7. In vitro effects	92
1.8. Analytical methodology	95
References	95
Further reading	112
CHAPTER 2: CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF BODY FLUIDS OTHER THAN BLOOD	
William Z. Borer	115
2.1. Introduction	115
2.2. Fluids of the central nervous system and special senses	116
2.3. Effusion	121
2.4. Fluids of the genitourinary system	132
2.5. Saliva, faeces and meconium	150
2.6. Specialized glandular secretions	159
References	161
Further reading	179

CHAPTER 3: HYDROGEN IONS AND BLOOD GASES**Ole Siggaard-Andersen**

181

3.1.	Introduction	183
3.2.	Concentration of free hydrogen ion in arterial plasma	186
3.3.	Concentration of titratable hydrogen ion in plasma, blood or extracellular fluid	198
3.4.	Partial pressure of carbon dioxide in arterial blood	205
3.5.	Concentrations of total carbon dioxide and bicarbonate in plasma	214
3.6.	Partial pressure of oxygen in arterial and mixed venous blood	219
3.7.	Partial pressure of oxygen in blood at half saturation of oxygen in haemoglobin	229
3.8.	Saturation of oxygen in haemoglobin in arterial blood	236
3.9.	Case histories	238
	References	241
	Further reading	245

CHAPTER 4: GLUCOSE METABOLISM**C. Nicholas Hales and Robert D.G. Milner**

247

4.1.	Introduction	248
4.2.	Normal glucose metabolism in man	248
4.3.	Investigation of glucose metabolism	256
4.4.	Investigation of insulin metabolism	260
4.5.	Investigation of glucagon metabolism	264
4.6.	Diagnosis and management of some conditions affecting glucose metabolism	264
	References	278
	Further reading	279
	Addendum	280

CHAPTER 5: LIPIDS**Barry Lewis**

281

5.1.	Introduction	282
5.2.	The lipoproteins of plasma	282
5.3.	Definitions of normal lipid concentrations	285
5.4.	The hyperlipidaemic states	289
5.5.	Methods for lipid and lipoprotein analysis	298
	References	306
	Further reading	309
	Addendum	309

CHAPTER 6: PROTEINS**Theodore Peters, Jr.**

311

6.1.	The nature of proteins	312
6.2.	Metabolism of proteins	325
6.3.	Some specific plasma proteins	332
6.4.	Summarized indications for screening or for specific tests	355

References	357
Further reading	360
Addendum	361

CHAPTER 7: ENZYMES

Mogens Hørder and J. Henry Wilkinson	363
--------------------------------------	-----

7.1. Materials	365
7.2. Methodology	370
7.3. Biochemistry and physiology of enzymes	375
7.4. Application of enzyme measurements in clinical medicine	382
7.5. Biological variability of enzymes	398
References	399
Further reading	405
Addendum	405

CHAPTER 8: CALCIUM AND MAGNESIUM

Kay W. Colston, Imogen M.A. Evans, Peter B. Greenberg, Richard G. Larkins and Iain MacIntyre	407
--	-----

8.1. Biochemical physiology of calcium	409
8.2. Parathyroid hormone	411
8.3. Calcitonin	421
8.4. Vitamin D	423
8.5. Disorders of calcium homeostasis	426
8.6. Metabolic bone diseases	432
8.7. Biochemical physiology of magnesium	439
8.8. Measurement of serum magnesium	440
8.9. Disorders of magnesium homeostasis	440
References	443
Further reading	450
Addendum	450

CHAPTER 9: RENAL FUNCTION

Douglas A.K. Black and J. Stewart Cameron	453
---	-----

9.1. Normal function	454
9.2. Aspects of renal pathology	460
9.3. The syndromes of renal disease	466
9.4. Tests used in the investigation of renal disease	483
9.5. Summary statement on the place of biochemical tests in renal disease	514
References	515
Further reading	524
Addendum	524

CHAPTER 10: LIVER FUNCTION

E. Anthony Jones and Paul D. Berk

525

10.1. Introduction	528
10.2. Static chemical tests	529
10.3. Immunologic tests	590
10.4. Dynamic tests	603
10.5. Laboratory tests in selected clinical situations	617
10.6. Aids to the interpretation of laboratory tests	642
10.7. Concluding remarks	643
References	646
Additional references	662

CHAPTER 11: GASTRIC FUNCTION

James B. Elder and Provash C. Ganguli

663

11.1. Saliva	664
11.2. Hydrochloric acid	665
11.3. Pepsin	673
11.4. Gastric mucus	676
11.5. Gastrin	677
References	684
Further reading	687

CHAPTER 12: INTESTINAL AND PANCREATIC FUNCTION

C. Derek Holdsworth

689

12.1. Nutritional assessment in gastrointestinal disease	691
12.2. Diarrhoea	699
12.3. Abdominal pain	703
12.4. Malabsorption	705
12.5. Assessment of pancreatic function	722
12.6. Immunological tests in diagnosis	731
References	732
Further reading	734

CHAPTER 13: THYROID FUNCTION

Raymond Hoffenberg

735

13.1. Thyroid physiology	736
13.2. Disease of the thyroid gland	742
13.3. Thyroid function tests	746
References	766
Further reading	768
Addendum	769

CHAPTER 14: STEROID HORMONES

Vivian H.T. James and Frederick L. Mitchell	771
14.1. Introduction	772
14.2. Group assays	773
14.3. Measurements of individual steroids and production rates	778
14.4. Assessment of adrenocortical function	783
14.5. Aldosterone and the control of electrolyte metabolism	792
14.6. Steroid metabolism in pregnancy, the perinatal period and in infancy	799
14.7. Investigation of androgen metabolism	812
References	815
Further reading	820
Addendum	821

CHAPTER 15: FERTILITY, PREGNANCY AND CONTRACEPTION

R. Angus Harkness	823
15.1. Introduction	824
15.2. Methods of diagnosis	825
15.3. Principles of diagnostic methods	826
15.4. Physiological and pathological states	830
15.5. Biochemical changes after oral contraceptives	841
15.6. Conclusion	846
References	846
Further reading	849

CHAPTER 16: HAEMATOLOGICAL BIOCHEMISTRY

Israel Chanarin	851
16.1. Interpretation of blood count values	853
16.2. Assessment of iron status	855
16.3. Assessment of megaloblastic anaemia	860
16.4. Assessment of total haemopoiesis	866
16.5. Assessment of white blood cell function	868
16.6. Assessment in haemolytic states	869
16.7. Assessment in bleeding disorders	872
16.8. Anticoagulant therapy	876
16.9. The anaemia of chronic disorders or secondary anaemia	876
References	876
Further reading	878

CHAPTER 17: ABNORMAL HAEMOGLOBINS

Robin W. Carrell and Hermann Lehmann	879
17.1. The haem group	880
17.2. Globin	882

17.3.	Biosynthesis and mutation	898
17.4.	Diagnostic techniques	903
17.5.	Detection and identification of variants	907
17.6.	Specific haemoglobinopathies – investigation and interpretation	916
	References	922
	Further reading	925
	Addendum	925

CHAPTER 18: INBORN ERRORS OF METABOLISM

	D. Noel Raine	927
18.1.	Introduction	928
18.2.	Genetic considerations	928
18.3.	Pathogenetic mechanisms	931
18.4.	Classification of inherited metabolic disease	934
18.5.	Inherited biochemical abnormalities not associated with disease	934
18.6.	Screening healthy populations for early detection of inherited metabolic disease	935
18.7.	Screening a patient for evidence of metabolic disease	936
18.8.	Recognition of heterozygotes	937
18.9.	Prenatal detection of an affected foetus	938
18.10.	Monitoring treatment	939
18.11.	Some groups of inherited metabolic diseases	942
	References	1002
	Further reading	1005
	Addendum	1007

CHAPTER 19: TRACE ELEMENTS

	F. William Sunderman, Jr.	1009
19.1.	Introduction	1010
19.2.	Zinc	1010
19.3.	Copper	1015
19.4.	Chromium	1022
19.5.	Manganese	1023
19.6.	Nickel	1025
19.7.	Lead	1026
19.8.	Gold	1029
19.9.	Other trace metals	1030
	References	1030
	Further reading	1037

CHAPTER 20: PORPHYRINS

	Donald P. Tschudy	1039
20.1.	Porphyrin and haem chemistry and biochemistry	1039
20.2.	Classification of the porphyrias	1044
20.3.	Clinical aspects of the porphyrias	1044

20.4. Chemical findings in the porphyrias	1045
References	1056
Further reading	1058

CHAPTER 21: PURINES AND NUCLEOTIDES

Richard W.E. Watts	1059
21.1. Biochemistry, physiology and pharmacology	1061
21.2. Analytical considerations	1081
21.3. The normal concentration of urate in plasma	1090
21.4. The normal urinary excretion of uric acid	1096
21.5. Gout	1097
21.6. The Lesch-Nyhan syndrome	1100
21.7. PRPP synthetase deficiency	1103
21.8. Renal disease due to disorders of purine metabolism	1103
21.9. Primary renal disease and uric acid disorders	1105
21.10. Xanthinuria (congenital xanthine oxidase deficiency)	1105
21.11. Xeroderma pigmentosum	1109
References	1109
Further reading	1118
Addendum	1119

CHAPTER 22: VITAMINS

Hipolito V. Niño	1121
22.1. Introduction	1122
22.2. Vitamin A	1124
22.3. Vitamin D	1127
22.4. Vitamin E	1131
22.5. Vitamin K	1133
22.6. Thiamine (vitamin B ₁)	1135
22.7. Riboflavin (vitamin B ₂)	1138
22.8. Niacin	1140
22.9. Vitamin B ₆	1143
22.10. Pantothenic acid	1144
22.11. Biotin	1145
22.12. Ascorbic acid (vitamin C)	1145
22.13. Other compounds	1147
22.14. Therapeutic applications of vitamins	1150
References	1152
Further reading	1158
Addendum	1159

CHAPTER 23: TOXICOLOGY AND DRUG MONITORING

Stanley S. Brown and Alexander A.H. Lawson	1161
23.1. Introduction	1162
23.2. Basic principles of pharmacokinetics and pharmacology	1164

23.3.	The case for drug monitoring and some examples	1172
23.4.	Basic principles of clinical toxicology	1182
23.5.	Prevalence of acute poisonings and some examples	1188
23.6.	Conspectus	1204
References		1205
Further reading		1215

CHAPTER 24: NEUROGENIC AMINES AND SECRETING TUMOURS

Colin R.J. Ruthven and Merton Sandler 1217

24.1.	Introduction	1219
24.2.	The key role of monoamine oxidase	1219
24.3.	Catechol- <i>O</i> -methyltransferase	1222
24.4.	Catecholamines	1224
24.5.	Catecholamine-secreting tumours	1241
24.6.	Other conditions associated with abnormal catecholamine production	1257
24.7.	Biochemical diagnosis of catecholamine-secreting tumours	1260
24.8.	Indolealkylamines	1272
24.9.	Biochemical diagnosis of carcinoid tumour	1276
24.10.	Conclusion	1277
References		1277
Further reading		1291

CHAPTER 25: CANCER

Morton K. Schwartz and Donald S. Young 1293

25.1.	Introduction	1295
25.2.	Enzymes	1296
25.3.	Hormones	1308
25.4.	Polyamines	1315
25.5.	Tumour-associated antigens	1317
25.6.	Proteins	1325
25.7.	Lipids	1331
25.8.	Trace and other elements	1332
25.9.	Miscellaneous compounds	1334
25.10.	Products of tumour metabolism	1336
25.11.	Population screening	1337
References		1338
Further reading		1345
Addendum		1346

Subject index	1349
---------------	------

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CONTENTS

1.1. Introduction	3
1.1.1. Composition of the body	3
1.1.2. The individual versus the population	5
1.1.3. Reference values	6
1.1.4. Mathematically derived normal values	6
1.2. Genetic influences	7
1.3. Long-term physiological influences	8
1.3.1. Ageing	8
1.3.1.1. Newborn	8
1.3.1.2. Childhood to puberty	12
1.3.1.3. Adult life	15
1.3.1.4. Old age	16
1.3.2. Sex	18
1.3.3. Race	19
1.3.4. Geographical location	21
1.3.4.1. Environmental temperature and climate	22
1.3.4.2. Other environmental influences	23
1.3.5. Body build and obesity	23
1.3.6. Diet	25
1.3.6.1. Habitual diet	26
1.3.6.2. Vegetarianism	28
1.3.6.3. Synthetic diet	29
1.3.6.4. Malnutrition and protein calorie deficiency	29
1.3.6.5. Fasting and starvation	31
1.3.7. Pregnancy	35
1.3.7.1. Multiple pregnancy	40
1.3.7.2. Labour	40
1.3.7.3. Puerperium	40
1.3.8. Vasectomy	41
1.3.9. Occupation and social class	41
1.3.10. Season	42
1.3.11. Blindness	43

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