

Association of Clinical Characteristics with the Proportion of the HDL-Cholesterol Subclasses HDL-2b and HDL-3 Among Patients Undergoing Hemodialysis

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Abstract

Background: Altered high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) composition in patients with chronic kidney disease is common. However, reports on the distribution of HDL-C subclasses in patients undergoing hemodialysis (HD) are limited.

Objective: We aimed to compare the two main HDL-C subclasses, HDL-2b and HDL-3, in two cohorts of HD patients and healthy individuals and examine their associations with clinical characteristics.

Methods: A total of 164 prevalent HD patients and 71 healthy individuals in one hospital-facilitated outpatient clinic were enrolled from May 2019 to July 2019. The HDL-2b and HDL-3 proportions were measured and statistical analysis was performed.

Results: The mean ages of HD patients and healthy individuals were 63 and 49.9 years, respectively. HD patients showed lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 proportions compared with those of healthy individuals (23.6% vs. 31.2%, $P < 0.001$; 31.7% vs. 33.6%, $P = 0.137$, respectively). The HDL-2b proportion was significantly higher with a high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP) levels of <3 mg/L compared with hs-CRP ≥ 3 mg/L in the HD cohort ($P = 0.005$). HDL-3 proportion was lower with a hs-CRP level of <3 mg/L compared with hs-CRP ≥ 3 mg/L in the HD cohort ($P = 0.022$). Sex and diabetes did not influence the HDL-2b and HDL-3 proportions in the HD cohort.

Conclusions: HD patients had lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 proportions than those of healthy individuals. The distribution of the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses in HD patients is influenced by proinflammatory status, not by sex and diabetic status.

Introduction

Patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) are at high risk for cardiovascular diseases (CVD)[1, 2]. In particular, CVD confers to high overall mortality in the dialysis population[3, 4]. High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) has been well recognized as an independent predictor of CVD in the general population[5, 6]. Interestingly, several conditions are free from this association, for example, drug intervention to elevate the HDL-C levels, refined HDL-C by genetic effect, and specific higher HDL-C levels[7–9].

In the CKD population, dyslipidemia has been considered as a major risk factor for CVD. Screening for dyslipidemia in patients with CKD is supported by clinical guidelines[10–12]. Although decreased HDL-C levels and its impaired composition and function are generally documented in the CKD population, the association of HDL-C with CVD risk is still controversial[13–17].

HDL is composed of several subclass particles, varying in size, density, chemical composition, and physicochemical properties[18]. Generally, HDL can be divided into the following subclasses by gel electrophoresis coupled with immunoblotting: HDL-2a, HDL-2b (large size, cholesterol rich), HDL-3a, HDL-

3b, HDL-3c, pre β_1 -HDL (small size), and pre β_2 -HDL[19]. In prior studies, HDL subclasses contribute to different effects on atherosclerosis. An increased large particle level, HDL-2b, exerts an antiatherogenic effect. In contrast, increased smaller particle levels, HDL-3 and pre β_1 -HDL, are positively associated with CVD[18, 20–22]. Due to complex technique and instrument requirement, the measurement of HDL subclasses is not widely applied in the past years. Recently, a microfluidic chip-based technique is developed. This fast, easy-to-operate technique is successfully applied to measure the HDL subclasses in the epidemiological studies[23, 24].

In this study, we hypothesize that patients with hemodialysis (HD) have different proportions of the HDL subclasses compared with healthy individuals. Using the microfluidic chip-based technique, we measured the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in HD patients and correlated these with their demographic characteristics and proinflammatory status.

Materials And Methods

Study design and participants

Adult patients (> 18 years) who underwent maintenance HD thrice weekly for at least 3 months in the outpatient clinic in Kaohsiung Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan from May 2019 to July 2019 were enrolled in this study. The exclusion criteria were as follows: ongoing treatment for malignancy, acute inflammatory diseases, hospitalization within 3 months, malnutrition defined by serum albumin level < 3.5 g/dL, and pregnancy. Healthy controls were recruited voluntarily in the outpatient clinic by posted protocol notification. All blood samples from HD patients in the fasting status and in mid-week (Wednesday and Thursday) were obtained. Informative patient data, including demographic profiles and laboratory parameters, were also collected.

Analytic Parameters

All blood samples for biochemistry measurement were obtained using commercial kits and an autoanalyzer (Hitachi 7600 – 210, Hitachi Ltd., Tokyo, Japan). Albumin levels were measured using the bromocresol green method. Intact parathyroid hormone level was measured using a chemiluminescence immunoassay (Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics Inc., USA). The high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (hs-CRP) level was assayed using the immunoturbidimetric method (Spectra East Laboratories, Rockleigh, NJ, USA).

The plasma total cholesterol, triglyceride, and HDL-C levels were determined enzymatically on the Eroset Hitachi 7600 – 210 analyzer. The low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) levels were calculated using to the Friedewald formula, which provides reliable values up to a triglyceride level of 4.0 mmol/L.

HDL-C subclass profiles were measured by electrophoresis of a microfluidic chip system. Briefly, serum samples, calibrator, and QC materials were diluted 1:50 in sample buffer in the presence of a mixture of

lipophilic fluorescent dyes and allowed to incubate for 5–15 min prior to loading on to chips. Separation was carried out in a microfluidic device (MICEP-30, Ardent BioMed). The entire procedure was performed in less than 1 h. The HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses were automatically calculated in line by a proprietary algorithm (Ardent BioMed LLC, Mt. View, California, USA).

Statistical analysis

The baseline demographic characteristics and laboratory measurements in HD patients and healthy controls are presented as frequency (percentage) and mean (standard deviation). The distribution difference was estimated using the independent two-sample t-test or chi-square test. The correlation between the HDL-2b and HDL-3 proportions and associated variables was estimated using the Pearson correlation test. A boxplot was used to illustrate the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in different subgroups, and the difference in these proportions between comparison groups was estimated using the independent two-sample t-test. All *P* values were two-sided, and $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. All statistical analyses were performed using the R 3.6.3 software (R Core Team, 2020).

Results

Characteristics of participants

Participants were screening by inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, a total of 164 participants with HD and 71 healthy controls were included in the analyses (Fig. 1). The mean ages of participants with HD and healthy controls were 63 and 49.9 years, respectively. The male-to-female percentages in the HD cohort and healthy controls were 48.8–51.2% and 31.0–69.0%, respectively. In the comparison of main laboratory parameters, HD patients showed a significantly lower HDL-2b subclass proportion compared with healthy controls (23.6% vs. 31.2%, $P < 0.001$) as well as lower total cholesterol (152 vs. 189 mg/dL, $P < 0.001$), HDL-C (44.5 vs. 59.8 mg/dL, $P < 0.001$), and LDL-C (88.1 vs. 112.1 mg/dL, $P < 0.001$) levels. The HDL-3 subclass proportion was not significantly different between the HD patients and healthy controls (31.7% vs. 33.6%, $P = 0.137$) (Table 1).

Table 1
Baseline characteristics (N = 235).

Variables	HD (n = 164)	Control (n = 71)	<i>P</i>
Age (years)	63.1 ± 12.3	49.9 ± 10.6	< 0.001
Sex			0.017
female	84 (51.2%)	49 (69.0%)	
male	80 (48.8%)	22 (31.0%)	
BMI(kg/m ²)	23.5 ± 12.5	23.3 ± 4.1	0.925
Dialysis vintage (years)	10.48 ± 7.53	-	-
Diabetes	27 (16.5%)	N/A	-
CVA	3 (1.8%)	N/A	-
CAD	6 (3.7%)	N/A	-
Antihypertensive	66 (40.2%)	-	
Lipid-lowering drugs	24 (14.6%)	-	
Etiology of kidney failure			-
Primary kidney disease	61 (37.2%)	N/A	
Systemic disease	79 (48.2%)	N/A	
Unknown	24 (14.6%)	N/A	
Laboratory measurements			
Total Cholesterol (mg/dL)	152 (94–314)	189 (135–310)	< 0.001
Triglyceride (mg/dL)	108 (30–994)	80.5 (18–237)	< 0.001
HDL-C (mg/dL)	44.5 ± 15.4	59.8 ± 14.0	< 0.001
HDL-2b (%)	23.6 ± 9.1	31.2 ± 6.7	< 0.001
HDL-3 (%)	31.7 ± 11	33.6 ± 7.5	0.137
LDL-C (mg/dL)	88.1 ± 35.0	112.1 ± 30.8	< 0.001
Intact-PTH (pg/ml)	268.2 (2.4–2819.9)	53.6 (20.9–90.2)	< 0.001

Abbreviations: BMI, body mass index; CVA, cerebral vascular accident; CAD, coronary artery disease; HDL, high-density lipoprotein; LDL, low-density lipoprotein; VLDL, very low-density lipoprotein; C, cholesterol; T, total; PTH, parathyroid hormone; BUN, blood urea nitrogen; Cr, creatinine; hs-CRP, high-sensitivity C-reactive protein.

Variables	HD (n = 164)	Control (n = 71)	<i>P</i>
Albumin (g/dL)	3.9 ± 0.3	4.2 ± 0.8	0.075
hs-CRP (mg/L)	6.9 ± 13.0	2.7 ± 5.0	0.016
Hemoglobin (g/dL)	10.7 ± 1.2	12.6 ± 1.7	< 0.001
Total leukocytes (10 ⁹ /L)	6.3 ± 2.4	6.1 ± 1.7	0.567
BUN (mg/dL)	69 (32–151)	13 (7–46)	< 0.001
Cr (mg/dL)	10.4 ± 2.3	0.7 ± 0.2	< 0.001
Abbreviations: BMI, body mass index; CVA, cerebral vascular accident; CAD, coronary artery disease; HDL, high-density lipoprotein; LDL, low-density lipoprotein; VLDL, very low-density lipoprotein; C, cholesterol; T, total; PTH, parathyroid hormone; BUN, blood urea nitrogen; Cr, creatinine; hs-CRP, high-sensitivity C-reactive protein.			

Pearson correlation analysis on study parameters

The results from the Pearson correlation test showed that the HDL-2b subclass proportion was significantly negatively correlated with age ($r = -0.26$, $P < 0.001$), HDL-3 subclass proportion ($r = -0.54$, $P < 0.001$), triglyceride ($r = -0.44$, $P < 0.001$), and total leukocyte count ($r = -0.16$, $P < 0.05$). On the other hand, it was significantly positively correlated with HDL-C ($r = 0.68$, $P < 0.001$), total cholesterol ($r = 0.21$, $P < 0.01$), and hemoglobin ($r = 0.16$, $P < 0.05$). Similarly, the HDL-3 subclass proportion was significantly negatively correlated with the HDL-2b subclass proportion ($r = -0.54$, $P < 0.001$) and HDL-C ($r = -0.52$, $P < 0.001$) and positively correlated with triglyceride ($r = 0.51$, $P < 0.001$), hemoglobin ($r = 0.14$, $P < 0.05$), and total leukocyte count ($r = 0.19$, $P < 0.01$) (Table 2).

Table 2
Pearson correlation analysis.

Variables	HDL-2b (%)	HDL-3(%)
Age (years)	-0.26**	0.01
Total Cholesterol (mg/dL)	0.21**	-0.03
Triglyceride (mg/dL)	-0.44***	0.51***
HDL-C (mg/dL)	0.68***	-0.52***
HDL-2b (%)	1.00	-0.54***
HDL-3 (%)	-0.54***	1.00
LDL-C (mg/dL)	0.10	0.02
Intact-PTH (pg/ml)	< 0.001	-0.03
Albumin (g/dL)	0.05	0.13
hs-CRP (mg/L)	-0.11	< 0.001
Hemoglobin (g/dL)	0.16*	0.14*
Total leukocytes (10 ⁹ /L)	-0.16*	0.19**
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.		
- Figure 1. Participants flow diagram.		

Influence of sex on the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions

Both sexes in the HD cohort demonstrated significantly lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions compared with healthy controls. On the other hand, the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions were not different between sexes in the HD cohort (Fig. 2).

Associations of the hs-CRP levels with the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions

We stratified the entire cohort with the cutoff hs-CRP level of 3 mg/L (normal range < 3 mg/L in the laboratory) and examined the associations with the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions. The results showed that the HDL-2b ($P = 0.031$) and HDL-3 ($P = 0.030$) subclass proportions were significantly lower in the HD cohort under the hs-CRP level of < 3 mg/L compared with healthy controls. Similarly, the HDL-3 ($P = 0.004$) subclass proportion was significantly lower in the HD cohort under the hs-CRP level of ≥ 3 mg/L compared with healthy controls. However, this relationship was not noted in the HDL-2b ($P = 0.274$) subclass proportion (Fig. 3 - 1). We further examined the associations of the hs-CRP levels < 3 mg/L with the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in the HD cohort. The results showed that the HDL-2b ($P = 0.005$) subclass proportion was significantly lower under hs-CRP levels ≥ 3 mg/L compared

with those with hs-CRP levels < 3 mg/L. In contrast, HDL-3 ($P = 0.022$) subclasses revealed an opposite trend (Fig. 3 – 2).

Influence of diabetes on the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in the HD cohort

Diabetic patients with HD did not demonstrate significant differences in the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions compared with nondiabetic HD patients (Fig. 4).

Discussion

The key findings in our study are that HD patients presented lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions compared with healthy controls. In HD patients, the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions was influenced by proinflammatory status, not by sex differentiation and diabetes. Our findings indicate altered HDL composition in HD patients and potential utilization of the proportion of the HDL subclass analysis in clinical practice in these patients. We prefer to use proportions or ratio of HDL subclass analysis instead of a simple subclass measurement to generalize across the whole spectrum of the HDL levels[25, 26]. Moreover, the microfluidic chip-based technique is easy to be applied in the clinical investigation and could forward to cause-relationship investigation.

A growing body of evidence has demonstrated the decreased HDL function as anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and endothelial protection in patients with CKD and dialysis[27–30]. The mechanisms are complex, but altered HDL composition in CKD is thought to be one of the significant points[14, 15]. There are still rare reports in the literature about the HDL subclass distribution in patients with dialysis. Two reports have described that HD patients have a lower HDL-3 cholesterol level and do not have a decrease in the HDL-2 cholesterol level compared with healthy individuals[31, 32]. Another report observed contradictory results of increased HDL-3a and decreased HDL-2b subclass levels in patients with HD compared with healthy controls[33]. It is also reported that HD patients have decreased levels of both HDL-2 and HDL-3 cholesterol[34, 35]. The discrepancies in the aforementioned studies may have resulted from either the different methods for HDL subclass measurement or statistical comparison in different dialysis populations and relatively small case number. In our study, we used the microfluidic chip-based technique more easily to examine the proportional distribution of the HDL subclasses in HD patients. This technique has been successfully used to measure the HDL subclasses in the Prospective Cardiovascular Munster study[23]. Our participants with HD showed decreased proportions of both HDL-2b and HDL-3 compared with healthy individuals. This result is in accordance with previous recognition regarding the alteration of HDL composition in patients with CKD[13, 14, 16, 17]. The cause relationship of alteration in distributed proportions of the HDL-C subclasses on CVD prevalence in patients with CKD still warrants further investigation in a population-based, longitudinal observational study.

Interestingly, a difference was noted in the HDL-2 and HDL-3 cholesterol levels between sexes in the prior studies. The HDL-2 and HDL-3 cholesterol levels were lower in men compared with women in the general population and participants with rheumatoid arthritis and acute coronary syndrome[18, 36]. However, there was no difference in both sexes in participants with metabolic syndrome[26]. In our study, we found

that patients with HD showed lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in both sexes compared with healthy individuals. We also examined the associations of HDL-C subclasses with various clinical parameters. However, there is only HDL-C showing strong association with HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses. Due to the lack of compared reports, above findings need to be clarified in the future.

CKD is a proinflammatory status. CRP is commonly used as a marker of systemic inflammation. Recently, an elevated hs-CRP level has been linked to malnutrition, inflammation, and atherosclerosis syndrome and is considered to be a risk factor for morbidity and mortality in patients with CKD[37–39]. For mechanism investigation, CRP/oxLDL/ β 2GPI complex-aggravated atherosclerosis by increasing lipid uptake has been reported in a diabetic mouse study[40]. In our study, we found that decreased HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in HD patients in either low or high hs-CRP levels compared with healthy individuals. Interestingly, the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions were influenced by the hs-CRP levels in HD patients. However, diabetic status did not influence the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions in HD patients. Accordingly, proinflammatory status could suppress the HDL-2b and increase HDL-3 subclass proportions in patients with HD. However, the relationship between the severity of proinflammatory status and diabetes and HDL subclass distribution still needs to be determined in a future investigation.

Our study has several limitations. First, this was a small-sized, single-center study on an Asian HD population. The results may not be extrapolated to other ethnic HD populations. Second, our study only measured the HDL subclass proportion in HD patients in one time point. The longitudinal effect of HD on HDL subclass distribution cannot be obtained in our study. Third, our study participants were relatively clinically stable; therefore, associations between proinflammatory status and HDL subclass distribution cannot be stratified by wide-range hs-CRP levels. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the strengths of our study are that this is the first clinical study to examine the proportions of the HDL subclasses HDL-2b and HDL-3 in HD patients and there is availability of cause-specific data to fill knowledge gap about reasons for HDL subclass distribution in these patients. The clinical utility of HDL subclass distribution analysis would be further facilitated by spanning a full-range HDL-C population and determine the subclass distribution on adverse CVD event.

Conclusions

HD patients have lower HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclass proportions compared with healthy individuals. The distribution of the HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses is influenced by proinflammatory status, not by sex and diabetic status.

Declarations

Acknowledgments

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Authors' contributions

J.B.C. conceptualized the study. J.B.C. and W.C.L. wrote the methodology. S.H.M. performed the formal analysis. J.B.C. wrote and prepared the original draft. W.C.L. and J.B.C. wrote, reviewed, and edited the manuscript. C.H.Y. provided supervision.

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Availability of data and materials

The data analyzed during the present study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics approval and consents to participants

The protocol for the study was approved by the Committee on Human Research at Kaohsiung Chang Gung Memorial Hospital (IRB document: 201801486B0) in Taiwan and conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants signed informed consent to approve study initiation.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Competing interests

All authors declared no conflict of interest in the manuscript preparation.

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Figures

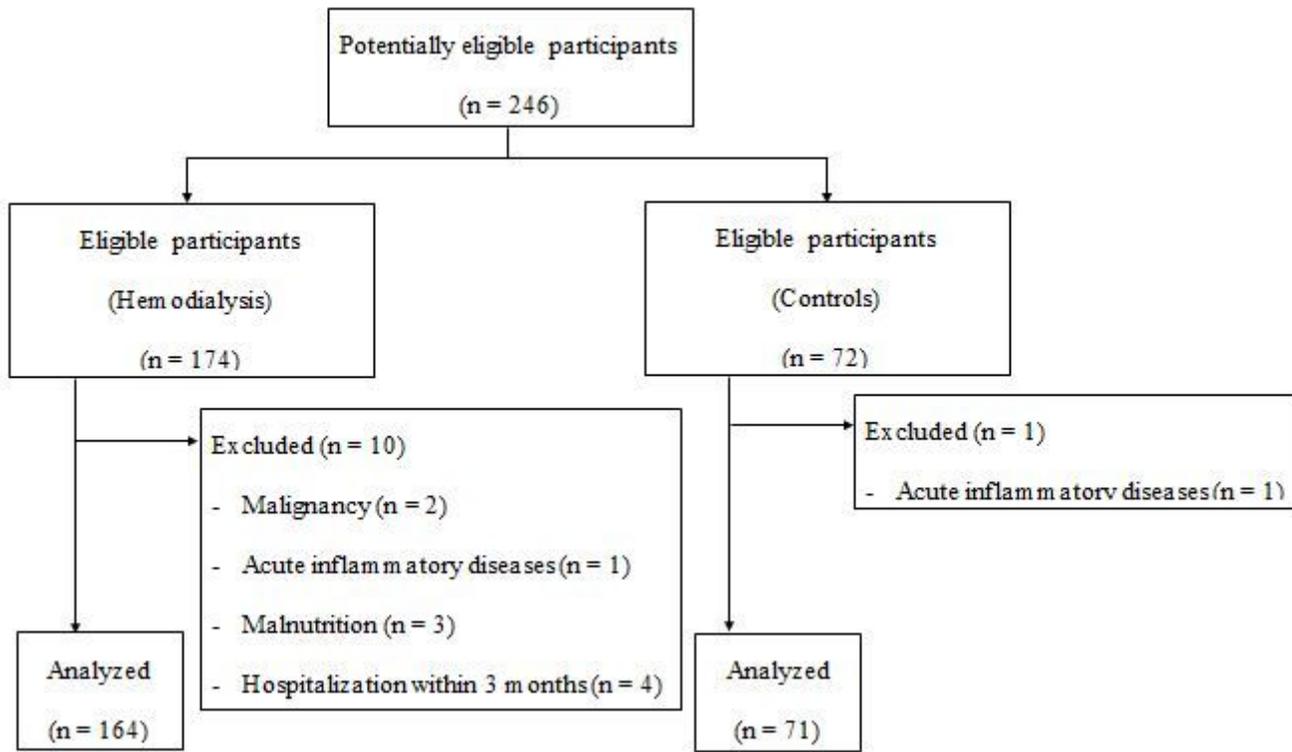


Figure 1

Participants flow diagram.

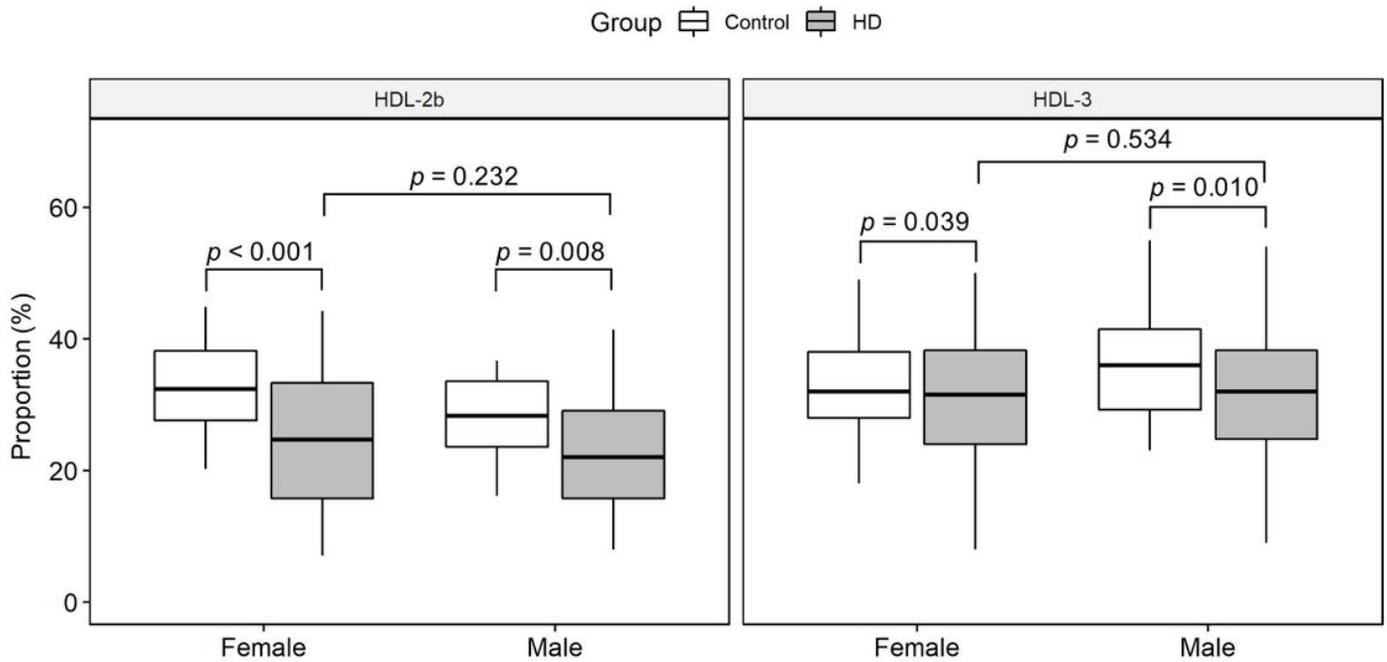


Figure 2

Proportion of HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses among male and female study cohorts

Group  Control  HD

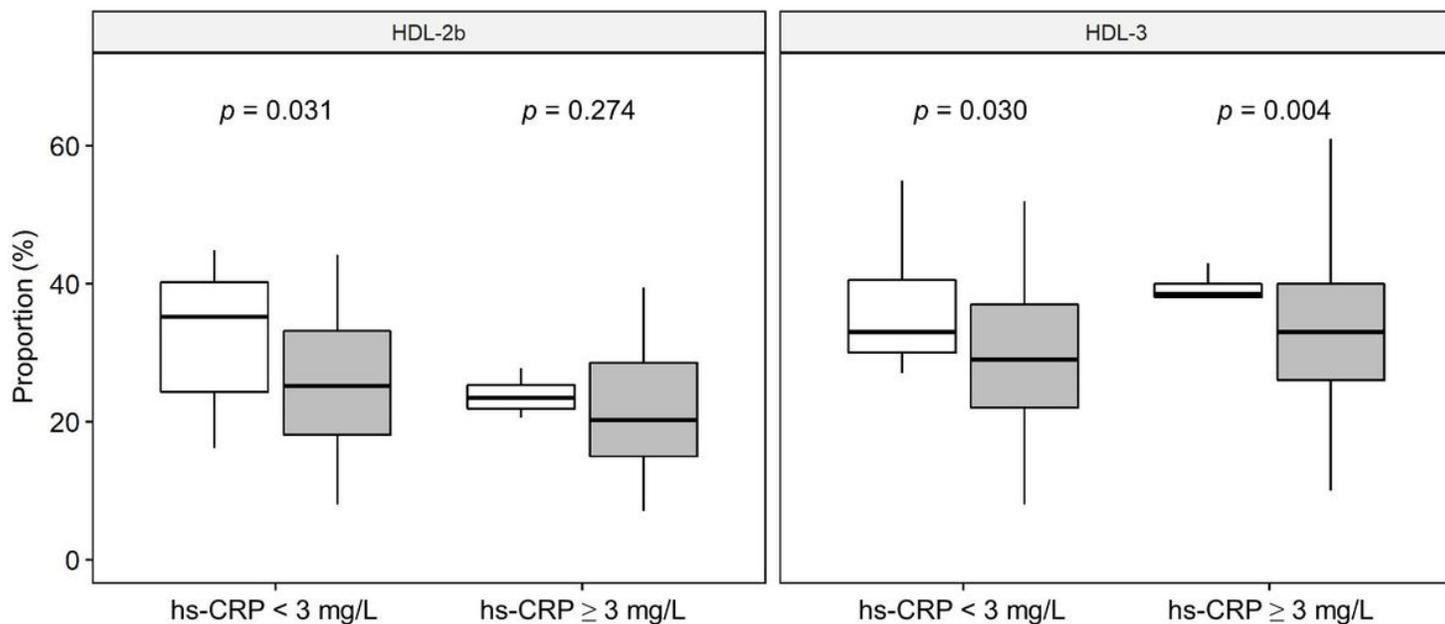


Figure 3

Proportion of HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses in study cohorts stratified by an hs-CRP concentration 3 mg/L.

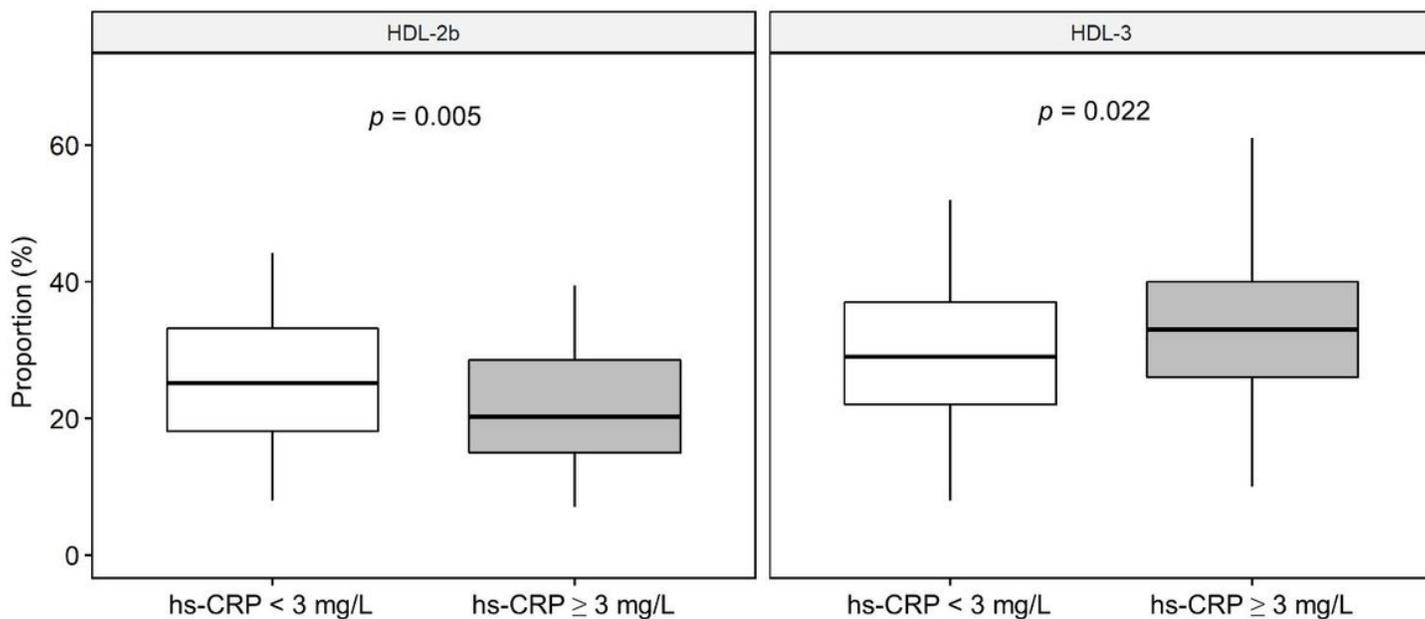


Figure 4

Proportion of HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses in patients with hemodialysis stratified by an hs-CRP concentrations 3 mg/L.

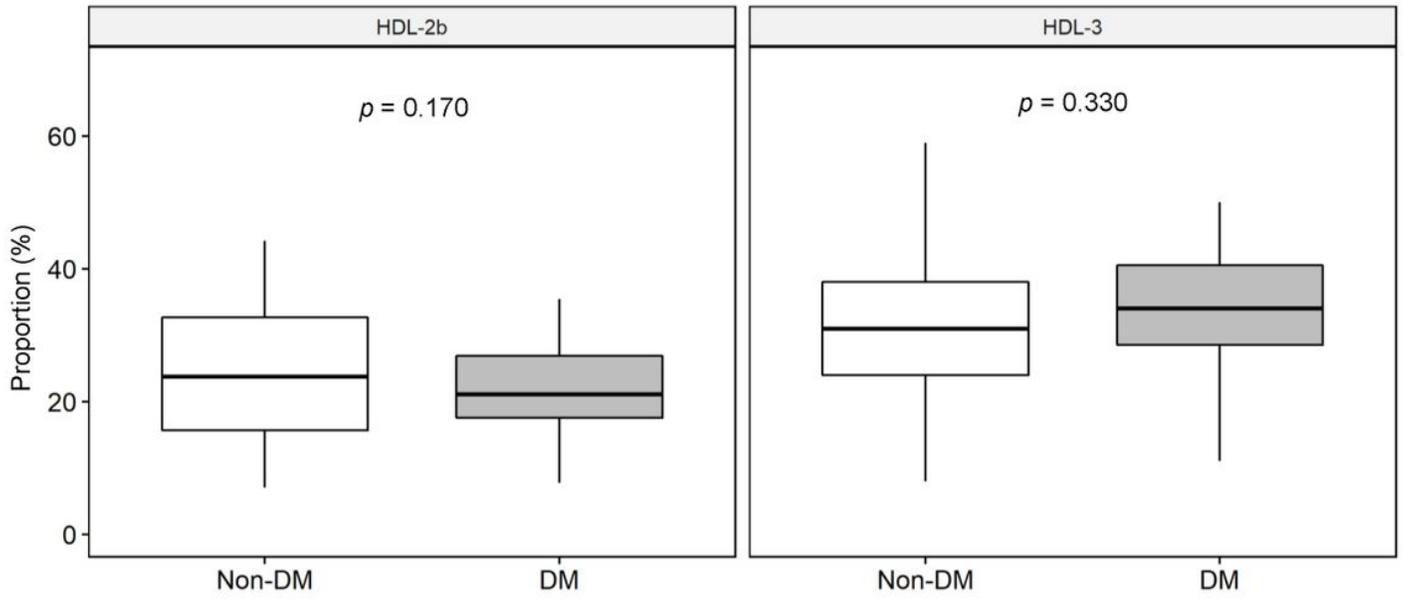


Figure 5

Proportion of HDL-2b and HDL-3 subclasses in diabetic and non-diabetic patients with hemodialysis.