

PRESS RELEASE

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Antiphospholipid Syndrome**A NEW TEST FOR DETECTING THE ANTIBODIES
RESPONSIBLE FOR THROMBOSES AND
MISCARRIAGES**

The Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and their spin-off Endotelix have created the best possible target molecule for the antibodies responsible for antiphospholipid syndrome. This discovery will enable a new screening test to be developed. This auto-immune syndrome leads to the thromboses responsible for strokes and heart attacks. It has a serious impact on pregnant women, and can cause the death of their foetuses. The limited reliability of the current screening tests means that diagnostics cannot be performed before the first clinical signs appear. The new approach on the part of the HUGs and Endotelix increases the likelihood of the syndrome being detected from 40% to 85%, and finally opens up the door to screening. You can find out more in [Research and Practice in Thrombosis and Haemostasis](#).

Antiphospholipid syndrome (APS) is an auto-immune disease that can cause miscarriages or the death of the foetus. Antibodies turn against certain proteins (phospholipids, fatty substances that are essential for the organism's survival) located on the surface of cells or circulating in the blood. These antibodies are called antiphospholipids.

While one study¹ estimates that the antiphospholipids are responsible for an APS in 50 to 100 people out of 100 000, experts put the prevalence at 1 to 5% of the global population. For every man affected, four women are affected. This auto-immunity creates clots that are responsible for thromboses and can disrupt the pregnancy. At least 15% of recurring miscarriages are due to a case of APS. APS is now recognised as the most easily avoidable cause of miscarriages².

“This syndrome is also very problematic prior to the pregnancy for women who desire a contraception. The cocktail of the APS and the hormonal pill causes infertility in 90% of cases within ten years,” warns François Mach, head doctor at the HUGs’ Cardiology Department, professor in the Department of Medicine at the UNIGE’s Medicine Faculty and co-author of the study.

¹ Dabit and colleagues. Curr Rheumatol Rep. 2021; 23(12): 85. DOI: [10.1007/s11926-021-01038-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11926-021-01038-2)

² Cervera R, et al. Ann Rheum Dis 2015;74:1011–1018. doi:10.1136/annrheumdis-2013-204838

While indirect treatments exist (chronic taking of anticoagulants), a reliable screening test would take effect before any dramatic consequences occur.

A quick and reliable test

The current tests have only 40% sensibility for antiphospholipids, “which amounts to a coin-toss”, notes Karim Brandt, a former member of the scientific staff at the UNIGE’s Medicine Faculty and Director of Science at Endotelix, who is responsible for the study. “That’s why the tests currently need to be correlated with clinical facts in order for an accurate diagnosis of APS to be made,” he adds. It’s a problematic situation given the seriousness of the clinical symptoms.

His team managed to develop a new test that is a hundred times finer, making the sensibility rise to 85%. This level of sensibility is sufficient to be able to offer a rapid test, like the antigen tests for COVID-19. It is mainly aimed at screening for women wanting a pregnancy or hormonal contraception, and will make it possible to prescribe treatments or appropriate care paths.

Finding the best target

We still don’t have a good understanding of the origins of APS, aside from knowing that, for unknown reasons, antiphospholipids are present in the blood. Immunologists also know one of its targets: a circulating glycoprotein known as Beta2GP1.

The strategy used by Karim Brandt’s team to develop this diagnostic test was to identify, as specifically as possible, the region of the Beta2GP1 that is targeted by the antiphospholipids. Their idea was to imitate the properties of this region by creating a fictitious molecule that was as similar as possible to the antiphospholipids, i.e. the quest for the perfect target for these antibodies.

His team set about analysing 600 molecules (peptides with different sequences of amino acids) showing similarities with the region of the Beta-2GP1 in the presence of antiphospholipids stemming from male and female patients. A molecule with sixty times more affinity for antiphospholipids than the target region of the Beta-2GP1 was thus found.

A synthetic antibody directed against the Beta-2GP1 was then created in the laboratory, thanks to this molecule. Allied to the [ELISA](#) biochemical analysis technique, it allows for a quantitative dosage and a very useful standardization of measures, synonymous with a high degree of reliability.

A study that will be of use for treatments

A test for research is already available and a clinical study in humans is in progress. If it succeeds, the expectation is that it will be put on the market in the near future. A rapid screening kit is currently being designed, moreover, with the partners at the National Centre for Scientific Research ([CNRS](#)) in Lyon. “Since the sequence of

amino acids has a high capacity for interaction with antiphospholipids, it could also serve as a direct inhibitor via monthly or bimonthly injections in the guise of treatment," Karim Brandt concludes.

For more information

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The HUG: Care, Teaching, and leading-edge Research

The Geneva University Hospital (HUG) comprises [eight public hospitals and two clinics](#). Their missions are to provide health care to the community in all medical specialties, to help train physicians and health professionals, and to conduct medical and clinical research. The HUG operate as a national reference centre for [influenza](#), [emerging viral infections](#), [meningococcus](#), and transplant immunology, and are the [national reference laboratory for histocompatibility](#). They are also a WHO Collaborating Centre [in six areas](#), as well as [Centres of Excellence](#) in a number of sectors. The HUG treat 275,000 patients each year, with a capacity of 2,015 hospital beds, and employ 12,800 people.

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About the University of Geneva

The University of Geneva was founded in 1559 by Jean Calvin and Théodore de Bèze and it ranks amongst the top 1% universities in the world. It enjoys worldwide recognition and develops an ever-strengthening international network, building upon its unique situation at the heart of International Geneva, a world capital for multilateralism. As a research-intensive institution, UNIGE has been awarded numerous prizes, including Nobel prizes and Fields medals, and is an active member of the European League of Research Universities (LERU). UNIGE focuses on multidisciplinary approaches to face today's challenges such as the digital revolution and the sustainable development goals. UNIGE welcomes about 19'000 students coming from nearly 150 different countries in its nine faculties and thirteen interdisciplinary centres embracing Sciences, Medicine, Humanities, Economics and Management, Social Sciences, Law, Theology, Psychology and Educational Sciences, as well as Translation and Interpreting. UNIGE fulfils three missions: education, research and knowledge sharing.

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