Autoimmune Liver Disease

Indications for Ordering

Differential evaluation of autoimmune liver disease (ALD) after exclusion of viral and drug-induced hepatitis, alcoholism, and specific hereditary risk factors

Test Description

Autoimmune Liver Disease Evaluation with Reflex to Smooth Muscle Antibody (SMA), IgG by IFA
  • Semiquantitative enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay/semiquantitative indirect fluorescent antibody
  • Components
    o F-Actin (Smooth Muscle) Antibody, IgG
    o Liver-Kidney Microsome – 1 Antibody, IgG
    o Mitochondrial M2 Antibody, IgG (ELISA)
    o Smooth Muscle Antibody, IgG Titer
ANCA-Associated Vasculitis Profile (ANCA/MPO/PR-3) with Reflex to ANCA Titer
  • Semiquantitative indirect fluorescent antibody/semiquantitative multiplex bead assay

Tests to Consider

Primary tests
Autoimmune Liver Disease Evaluation with Reflex to Smooth Muscle Antibody (SMA), IgG by IFA 2007210
  • Recommended first-line panel for evaluation of ALD
  • Negative results do not rule out disease
ANCA-Associated Vasculitis Profile (ANCA/MPO/PR-3) with Reflex to ANCA Titer 2006480
  • Initial test for evaluation of ALD in conjunction with autoimmune liver disease evaluation with reflex to SMA

Related tests

• Nuclear Antibody (ANA) by IFA, IgG 0050639
• F-Actin and Mitochondrial M2 Antibodies, IgG by ELISA with Reflex to Smooth Muscle Antibody (SMA), IgG by IFA 2007209
• F-Actin (Smooth Muscle) Antibody, IgG by ELISA with Reflex to Smooth Muscle Antibody, IgG Titer 0051174
• Liver Cytosolic Antigen Type 1 (LC-1) Antibody, IgG 2010711
• Liver-Kidney Microsome Antibody, IgG 0099270
• Liver-Kidney Microsome – 1 Antibody, IgG 0055241
• Mitochondrial M2 Antibody, IgG (ELISA) 0050065
• Smooth Muscle Antibody, IgG Titer 0051244
• Soluble Liver Antigen Antibody, IgG 0055235

Disease Overview

Prevalence
ALD – 5% of all liver diseases
  • Autoimmune hepatitis (AIH)
    o 15-25/100,000 inhabitants in Europe (EASL, 2015)
  • Primary biliary cholangitis (PBC)
    o 1.9-40.2/100,000 in European populations (EASL, 2017; Bowlus, 2014)

Incidence
  • AIH
    o 0.85-1.9/100,000 per year for adults of white northern European ancestry (Czaja, 2015)
  • Primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC)
    o 0.3-5.8/100,000 per year in European populations (EASL, 2017)

Physiology

ALD
  • Etiology – antibodies directed against the liver
  • Chronic course with slow progression – may resemble other chronic liver diseases (eg, alcoholic cirrhosis, chronic viral hepatitis)
  • Laboratory findings may include
    o Hypergammaglobulinemia (elevated total protein, decreased albumin, and decreased anion gap)
    o Elevated liver enzymes in the absence of chronic or drug-induced hepatitis
PBC – two main types, AIH types 1 and 2

- A variant of type 1, referred to as type 3, has been described
- AIH type 1 – most common
  - Female preponderance (70%-80% of cases)
  - Seen in all ethnic groups, with a predominance in Caucasians
  - Affects individuals of all ages, but less common in children
  - Associated autoimmune diseases
    - Thyroiditis
    - Rheumatoid arthritis
- AIH type 2 – usually presents in childhood; rare in adults
  - Clinical features vary widely
    - Arthralgias
    - Anorexia, fatigue, jaundice, lethargy, malaise
    - Hepatomegaly, nausea, upper abdominal pain
    - Progression to cirrhosis and liver failure possible
  - Antibody-negative disease
    - Same presentation and histology as antibody-positive AIH
    - Diagnosis of exclusion
    - No other etiology found for liver disease/cirrhosis – key to this diagnosis
  - Overlap syndrome (AIH present with one of the following)
    - Autoimmune cholangitis
    - Antimitochondrial antibodies (AMA)-negative PSC
    - Autoimmune sclerosing cholangitis
    - IgG4 cholangitis
    - PBC
    - PSC
  - Laboratory tests – several antibodies may be present, depending on AIH type (see table)

PBC

- Female preponderance (~90% of cases)
- Age – primarily >40 years
- Clinical features
  - Most patients are asymptomatic or only mildly fatigued at time of diagnosis
  - Chronic pruritus, hyperpigmentation
  - Jaundice, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly, upper abdominal pain
  - Progression to cirrhosis and liver failure possible
  - Many overlapping features with AIH
  - Associated with other autoimmune disorders (eg, CREST syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis)
- Laboratory tests
  - AMA – specific for PBC
  - Some patients with PBC may be negative for AMA but positive for GP210 or SP100 antibodies

PSC

- Male preponderance
- Age – ~40 years at time of diagnosis
- Strongly associated with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) – 75-90%
- Clinical features – mimic those of PBC
  - Clinical course varies widely
  - Asymptomatic patients – 20-40%
  - Fatigue, jaundice, pruritus, upper abdominal pain
  - Progression to cirrhosis and liver failure possible
  - Increased risk for
    - Cholangiocarcinoma
    - Colorectal cancer if PSC is concurrent with ulcerative colitis (compared to patients with only ulcerative colitis)
- Laboratory tests
  - Predominant – Atypical p-ANCA, ANA, +/- SLA

Diagnostic/prognostic issues

- May be difficult to diagnose AIH initially as symptoms may mimic those of chronic hepatitis
- No single diagnostic test for AIH
- Antibody testing may be helpful in diagnosing/distinguishing ALD subtype after more common etiologies of hepatitis have been ruled out (see table)
  - Titors may be lower early in disease
  - Low titers in children likely reflect disease
- Liver biopsy may be appropriate in certain patients
  - Should be performed when diagnosis is still unclear
  - Considered “gold standard”

Test Interpretation

Clinical sensitivity – ~85-90% for AMA

Results

See table

Limitations

- Negative antibody testing does not rule out ALD
- All interpretation of antibody patterns must be done in conjunction with clinical presentation
  - There may be overlap between diseases and antibodies detected
  - No single test shows absolute specificity

References

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<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>ANA Pattern</th>
<th>ANCA Pattern</th>
<th>SMA</th>
<th>F-actin</th>
<th>AMA (M2)</th>
<th>GP210</th>
<th>SP-100</th>
<th>LKM-1</th>
<th>LC-1</th>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
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<td>Atypical p-ANCA</td>
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<tr>
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**DISEASE KEY**
AIH, autoimmune hepatitis type 1 or 2; PBC, primary biliary cholangitis; PSC, primary sclerosing cholangitis

**TEST KEY**
AMA, antimitochondrial antibody; ANA, antinuclear antibody; GP210, glycoprotein-210; LC-1, liver cytosolic antigen type 1; LKM-1, liver-kidney microsome-1 (cytochrome P450 2D6); M2, mitochondrial antigen 2 (PDH-E2); p-ANCA, perinuclear antineutrophil cytoplasmic antibody; SLA, soluble liver antigen; SMA, smooth muscle antibody