Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt
ROOT CAUSE HEALTH DETECTIVE

DATE OF PUBLICATION
10/20/2026

YOUTUBE RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research Summary: ApoB and Lp(a)

As featured in Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt's video: ApoB and Lp(a): What Your Cholesterol Misses

Research Context

Cardiovascular risk assessment goes deeper than the cholesterol concentration number most people receive on a standard panel. The key variables are how many atherogenic particles are circulating, what type of particles they are, and what the metabolic terrain around them looks like. The studies below connect these dots across three distinct signals: ApoB as a particle-count measure, Lp(a) as a genetically driven independent risk factor, and endocrine terrain as a modifying layer that shapes how the whole picture reads clinically.

Key Findings from the Research

STUDY 1 · PMID 38839201

ApoB is a protein that sits on the surface of every atherogenic particle, exactly one per particle, making it a direct count of circulating atherogenic vehicles rather than a measure of cholesterol cargo. A 2024 position paper in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology concluded that ApoB is ready for routine clinical use, performing as a more precise predictor of cardiovascular risk than LDL cholesterol concentration. A person can carry a normal LDL result alongside a particle count high enough to be driving atherosclerosis in the background, a well-documented pattern that supports treating ApoB as a standard measurement worth requesting.

STUDY 2 · PMID 35583875

Lp(a) resembles LDL structurally but carries an additional attached protein that promotes clotting, contributes to inflammation, and interacts with plaque formation through pathways standard LDL particles do not share. A review published in JAMA Cardiology found that roughly 20 to 25 percent of the global population carries Lp(a) above a threshold associated with elevated cardiovascular risk, and that this elevated risk persists even after LDL has been optimized through lifestyle changes or medication. Statins do not reliably lower Lp(a), and dietary changes that move LDL do not meaningfully move Lp(a) either, leaving a fixed atherogenic signal that a standard panel never surfaces.

STUDY 3 · PMID 38628593

A 2024 review published in Frontiers in Endocrinology found that endocrine disorders, including thyroid dysfunction, can shift lipoprotein levels in clinically meaningful ways. The thyroid plays a role in how the liver processes and clears lipoproteins from the bloodstream. When thyroid function is lower than optimal, even at a subclinical level that has not crossed a formal diagnostic threshold, that clearance slows and lipid metabolism shifts. For someone already carrying elevated Lp(a), a sluggish thyroid can compound the overall cardiometabolic picture. The genetic baseline is a strong signal, and the terrain around it, thyroid status included, is worth examining as a potentially modifiable layer.

Functional Medicine Connections

The standard lipid panel asks a concentration question: how much cholesterol is in transit? ApoB asks a traffic question: how many atherogenic vehicles are on the road? Lp(a) adds a third dimension: one of those vehicle types operates through a completely different mechanism that the rest of the panel cannot see. When all three questions are asked together, a pattern emerges that a single-number panel cannot surface.

Someone with a normal LDL reading might have an elevated ApoB particle count. That same person might carry Lp(a) above a clinically meaningful threshold. And if their thyroid is operating at the low end of the normal range, the liver's lipoprotein clearance may be adding to the load in the background, compounding a risk picture that appears reassuring on a standard panel.

Cardiovascular risk is a multi-signal question. Each measurement tells you something real, and each one is also incomplete on its own. The functional medicine framing here is to read the whole pattern rather than respond to any single number in isolation. The body's systems are in constant communication, and the cardiometabolic picture reflects multiple overlapping signals at once.

Practical Reflections & Takeaways

If you have received a standard cholesterol panel that looked reassuring, it may be worth asking: what did that panel measure, and what was it not designed to capture? A normal LDL result is real information, and it is also only part of the picture.

If you have a family history of early cardiac events or have been told your thyroid is at the low end of normal, it may be worth asking whether ApoB and Lp(a) have ever been part of your cardiometabolic workup. Because Lp(a) levels are largely stable over time, a single test carries meaningful interpretive weight. The question is whether the conversation about it has ever been opened.

References

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