Research Paper: The Effect of Stump Level on Activity and Fatigability of Knee Extensor Muscles

Gholamreza Olyaei¹, Mohammad Reza Hadian¹, Saeed Talebian¹, Shohreh Jalaie¹, Seyed Asadullah Arslan¹, Masood Abdullah Hussein¹

1. Department of Physiotherapy, School of Rehabilitation, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, International Campus, Tehran, Iran.

Introduction:
Muscle fatigue is tiredness, in other words, loss of productive capacity of power in response to the activity. The development of fatigue during prolonged exercise may be evaluated by repeated assessments of maximal voluntary force. This study aimed to determine the effect of muscle fatigue on trans-tibial stump level in knee extensor muscles (vastus lateralis, vastus medialis, and rectus femoris) at 30 and 45 degree knee flexions by using surface electromyography.

Materials and Methods:
Forty male amputees with trans-tibial amputation, aged between 18-50 years were assigned randomly in three groups; performed three isometric contractions with extended knee at 80% of the maximal voluntary contraction. Median Frequency (MDF) and Root Mean Square (RMS) values were obtained by surface electromyography from the knee extensor muscles at 30 and 45 degree knee flexions. Force values in stump and sound sides during knee flexion at 30 and 45 degree were also compared.

Results:
Median frequency on sound side showed more fatigue and MDF-RMS between stump levels was short, medium, and long for knee extensor muscles at 30 and 45 degree, before and after the fatigue. No significant effect between stump and sound side was found. Vastus lateralis muscle showed more power than vastus medialis and rectus femoris muscles before fatigue. But after fatigue, rectus femoris muscle showed more power than vastus medialis and vastus lateralis.

Conclusion:
Results have confirmed that trans-tibial amputees with good functional ability showed more fatigability on the sound side while stump side showed more power. Vastus lateralis muscle had maximum power on both sides. Vastus medialis and rectus femoris of long stump levels and vastus lateralis muscle of short levels were more powerful.

1. Introduction

Fatigue is failure to maintain the required or expected force or an inability to continue working at a given exercise intensity [1]. The muscle fatigue or weariness is tiredness and the loss of productive capacity of power in response to the activity. Numerous physiological and psychological experiments have addressed the causes of fatigue. Physiological investigations have focused mainly on the relationship between

*Corresponding Author:
Masood Abdullah Hussein, MSc. Student
Address: Department of Physiotherapy, School of Rehabilitation, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, International Campus, Tehran, Iran.
Tel: +98 (990) 4663543
E-mail: ma.zedawan@yahoo.com
exercise, endurance, circulatory, metabolic, muscular, nutritional, and thermoregulatory factors and showed that many parameters affect the capacity for prolonged exercise. The development of fatigue during prolonged exercise may be evaluated by repeated assessments of maximal voluntary force or power output [2].

Reliable assessment of muscle fatigue is highly dependent upon measurement of the force generating capacity. In humans, what is often used is Maximal Voluntary Isometric Contraction (MVC). Several authors have pointed out that voluntarily generated force can be limited by lack of motivation and inhibitory effects at various levels in the central nervous system and at the muscle level. Maximal Voluntary Contraction (MVC) force or power output has been set as a sort of ‘gold standard’ to identify whether fatigue occurs or not [3]. Fatigue during exercise with the knee-extensors is easily quantified because there is only one direction of force generation (or movement), and the leg can be kept in a standard testing position. With practice and vocal encouragement by the staff, a low variability of unfatigued MVCs of upper and lower limb joints is reported [4]. In order to investigate the fatigue processes in more detail, one approach is to compare the effect on maximal power output with the effect on maximal force generating capacity. Newham et al. (1991) examined the isokinetic torque and the isometric force generating capacity before and 4 minutes after maximum knee extension. The MVC force and the maximal torque measured during fast isokinetic contractions drops to about 80%, whereas a slightly larger fall was observed for slow isokinetic contractions. Hence, the overall fatigue was thus comparable as judged by the different test contractions [5].

Amputation is the resection of a part of the lower or upper extremity of the body because of trauma, medical illness, or surgery. As a surgical measure, it is used to control pain or disease process in the affected limb such as malignancy or gangrene. In some cases, it is carried out on individual as a preventative surgery for such problems. Amputation had also been used as a tactic in war. It is classified on the basis of anatomical levels and site at which the amputation took place. For example, an amputation between the wrist and elbow is termed Trans-Radial (TR), also known as below-elbow amputation. It can be an amputation of above and below knee, partial foot, hip disarticulation, and knee disarticulation (Through Knee) for the lower limb [6]. There are two basic techniques commonly used for Below Knee (BK) amputation. The long posterior flap technique was introduced by Burgess and Romano in 1967 which is the most commonly used method [7]. The skew flap technique was described by Robinson in 1982 [8]. During pre-prosthetic and post-prosthetic the end stump is important to relieve pain because movement becomes difficult with pain.

The importance of the topic and shortage of data were my main reasons and motivation to perform this research. Surface EMG (sEMG) is often used to measure the muscle force production [9]. The rationale of this study was to find out the effect of muscle fatigue on Trans-Tibial (T.T) amputation. Muscle fatigue can be helpful to determine the duration and the type of exercise at rehabilitation centers.

2. Materials and Methods

After the approval from the Ethics Committee of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), this study was conducted at the physical rehabilitation center of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iraq. Forty male amputees with T.T amputation, aged between 18-50 years were assigned randomly in three groups; Group (A) amputees with short T.T amputation, Group (B) with medium T.T amputation, and group (C) with long T.T amputation. Raw data were collected by using sEMG device (NTS-2000-SEM-4) [10]. Each amputee was assessed in both stump and sound sides for any redness or injury. MVIC of knee extensor muscles was measured by using digital Lutron force gauge (LT FG-5020) before and after fatigue. The subjects comfortably maintained their knees at 30 and 45 degree knee flexion for both knees [11] and the force was measured in Newtons (N). Every patient executed three valid repetitions with 80% of MVC for 10 seconds to find the mean of maximum fatigue [12]. A resting time of 20 seconds was given between repetitions.

An amputee with T.T (BK) amputation contracted his muscles to reach muscle fatigue point which was measured by dynamometer. Electrodes were placed according to the guidelines of surface EMG for non-invasive assessment of muscles. Position of dynamometer was set at the resistant of knee flexion at 30 and 45 degree and placed on the 80% of length in stump and sound legs. First test was for selecting MVC, amputee performed 80% of MVC with knee flexion at 30 and 45 degree [13]. Mean force of 80% MVC for 3 trials was measured to select the extent of muscle fatigue. The next tests were performed before and after muscle fatigue by asking amputee to contract his muscle at 30 and 45 degree knee flexion by maintaining same position and it was monitored by dynamometer to reach at fix point which was selected previously from 3 trials of MVC to get fatigue point.

Fatigue of the knee extensors, Vastus Medialis (VM), Rectus Femoris (RF) and Vastus Lateralis (VL) quadriceps muscles was measured in both stump and sound sides us-
ing force transducer (N) after taking 80% of MVC. Maximum muscle activity during 5 seconds of early (before) and late (after fatigue occurred) was selected for comparison. Median frequency at above mentioned durations (5 seconds before and 5 seconds after fatigue) was considered for the analyses of fatigability. Maximum and minimum amplitude with duration were selected to measure muscle fatigue. Root mean square (RMS) was also measured for muscle fatigue process [14-17].

3. Results

The Median Frequencies (MDF) and RMS are presented in Table 1, by illustrating all study variables and conven-
Degenerative effects of fatigue were estimated from sound side muscles (VM, RF and VL) by indirect speed of sEMG signals and were reported in Table 2. Fatigue was higher in sound side than stump side at 30 degree knee flexion. Results showed that vast majority of fatigue was experienced in RMS of sound side at 30 degree flexion of VL, and were accounted as 37.92%, while RMS of stump side at 30 degree flexion of VL had reported the low result (12.63%). Both muscles, VM and RF were recorded as 37.66%, 21.79%, respectively in sound side at 30 degree knee flexion while in stump side these were 19.05% and 19.42%, respectively which showed the muscle fatigue in sound side.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stump Side/Sound Side</th>
<th>Indirect Speed to sEMG Signal</th>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Huber's μ Estimator</th>
<th>S²</th>
<th>μ/S²</th>
<th>Decay %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RMS of stump side 45 degree flexion of VM</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>435.7318</td>
<td>23.8261</td>
<td>18.2880</td>
<td>13.87 (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>373.3348</td>
<td>23.7007</td>
<td>15.7521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS of stump side 45 degree flexion of RF</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>82.2507</td>
<td>5.2963</td>
<td>15.5298</td>
<td>20.33 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>76.0119</td>
<td>6.1436</td>
<td>12.3725</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS of stump side 45 degree flexion of VL</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>475.4936</td>
<td>22.684</td>
<td>20.9616</td>
<td>10.83 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>369.2583</td>
<td>19.7551</td>
<td>18.6918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS of sound side 45 degree flexion of VM</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>418.1973</td>
<td>14.8683</td>
<td>28.1268</td>
<td>25.94 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>336.5194</td>
<td>16.1547</td>
<td>20.8311</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS of sound side 45 degree flexion of RF</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>425.1867</td>
<td>19.0393</td>
<td>22.3211</td>
<td>34.00 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>360.0421</td>
<td>24.4269</td>
<td>14.7396</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMS of sound side 45 degree flexion of VL</td>
<td>Before fatigue</td>
<td>494.9488</td>
<td>19.0284</td>
<td>26.0111</td>
<td>33.74 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After fatigue</td>
<td>369.1821</td>
<td>21.4193</td>
<td>17.2360</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Stump</th>
<th>VM Muscle</th>
<th>RF Muscle</th>
<th>VL Muscle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Difference (I-J)</td>
<td>SD Error</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Mean Difference (I-J)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>26.0967</td>
<td>60.43822</td>
<td>0.668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>06.1873</td>
<td>63.84951</td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>32.2802</td>
<td>61.77234</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 3 present the decays percentage of sEMG signals, indirect speed was due to fatigue of sound side at 45° knee flexion, followed by RF, VL and VM which were recorded as 34.00%, 33.74%, and 25.94%, respectively. The decay percentages of muscle fatigue in stump side were 20.33% for RF, 13.87% for VM, and 10.83% for VL. Results also clarified the muscle fatigue in sound side with 45 degree flexion.

There was no significant difference between stump levels; short, medium and long, for knee extensor muscles (VM, RF & VL) as shown in Table 4. The mean value of VL muscle increased in short stump than its mean in medium and long stump levels. The mean values of RF and VM muscle also increased in long stump level compared to their mean values in short and medium stump levels.

4. Discussion

Previous researchers had also discussed the effect of knee extensor fatigue on the muscle force and one such study proved significant decrease in the peak force of fatigued limb which is similar to present study but no significant changes in the non-fatigued limb’s muscle force were noted [18]. Active and independent ambulation with less expenditure of energy is the main objective during rehabilitation [6]. The rehabilitation program for pre- and post-prosthetic must include strengthening, maintenance of joint range of motion, best movement coordination of the remaining muscles and adequate development of proprioception. Patients with trans-tibial amputation have energy expenditure around 9% to 42% higher than people without amputations [19]. According to the findings of present research (Table 2), fatigue in the sound side extensor muscles was more than the stump side. One study previously evaluated the strength and endurance of the quadriceps and hamstring muscles in T.T amputees and showed that the fatigue index for extension was not significantly different in the sound limb from the amputated limb but fatigue index for flexion was significantly higher in the sound limb which also indicates the proper functioning of stump side muscles. Therefore, a significant and good reaction from the muscles of the amputated limb could be expected if a correct strengthening and endurance training program is selected properly [20].

Results of the present study showed an increase in muscle fatigues, sEMG, RMS for all three extensor muscles (VM, RF and VL) of the knee on the sound side at 30 and 45 degree knee flexion with 80% of MVC. Results confirmed more muscle fatigue on sound side compared to the stump side [21] in case of pressure on both sides at 30 and 45 degree knee flexion. Time and repetition of exercise for stump side must be taken into consideration because of difference in muscle fatigue, tightness, weakness; impaired balance due to gait asymmetries between two sides before and after performing prosthesis [22].

Results have also confirmed that T.T amputees with good functional ability at 30 and 45 degree knee flexion showed more fatigability on the sound side compared to the stump side. The stump side has also shown more power parameters in knee extensor muscles than the sound side. The VL muscle on stump and sound sides at both knees flexions (30 and 45 degree) had more power than RF and VM muscles. RF muscle of stump side with 30 degree knee flexion showed more power than 45 degree flexion. The long stump level had more power than medium and short stump levels for VM and RF muscles, while the short stump level had more power than long and medium stump levels for VL muscle.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guideline

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

Funding

The present article was extracted from the MSc. thesis of Masood Abdullah Hussein at Department of Physiotherapy, Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The research was conducted at Physical Rehabilitation Center for Prosthesis & Orthosis (ICRC) in Erbil / Iraq.

Conflict of interest

We confirm that this work has not been published elsewhere and is original. We also confirm that there is no conflict of interest to disclose and all the authors approved the manuscript for submission.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate all the relevant authorities at TUMS and the participants for helping us to accomplish this research.

References


