The BASES Expert Statement on Upper Body Exercise
Produced on behalf of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences by Dr. Lindsay Bottoms, Dr. Paul Smith, Dr. Garry Tew and Dr. Mike Price FBASES.

Introduction:
Lower-limb exercise is more commonly studied and prescribed than upper-body exercise (UBX). However, UBX has many important applications. This expert statement outlines the potential benefits of UBX, particularly arm crank ergometry (ACE), in specific populations, though more detailed testing guidelines are published elsewhere (Smith & Price, 2007).

Background and evidence:
Important points regarding the acute responses and chronic adaptations to UBX are as follows:
- In healthy individuals, peak oxygen consumption ($\dot{V}O_2$peak) for incremental UBX is approximately 30% lower than that measured during incremental lower-limb exercise, largely due to the smaller extent of muscle mass engaged.
- During sub-maximal exercise of the same absolute intensity, UBX evokes a lower stroke volume, a higher heart rate and increased blood pressure response compared with lower-body exercise.
- Adaptations to upper body endurance training typically depend on initial fitness, with greater gains for sedentary individuals.
- Finally, cross-transfer effects of ACE training are evident, especially for sedentary individuals.

ACE training in the elderly
Few studies have investigated the effects of ACE training in older adults. The most relevant study is that of Pogliaghi et al. (2006), compared the training adaptations of two groups of elderly men, who performed 12 weeks of either ACE or leg cycle training to that of a control group. At baseline and following the intervention, participants performed cardiopulmonary exercise tests to maximum volitional exertion on both arm-crank and cycle ergometers. This allowed the specific and cross-transfer effects of both modes of training to be assessed. Physiological responses during exercise testing did not change markedly in the control group from baseline to follow-up. A summary of the results for the two training groups is provided in Table 1.

These data indicate that both training modalities evoked physiologically meaningful improvements in both sub-maximal and maximal measures of cardiorespiratory fitness. Furthermore, mode-specific and cross-transfer adaptations were observed following both training programmes, with the cross-transfer effects being approximately 50% of the specific effects. The “transferability” of training benefits has been classically interpreted as indirect evidence of the central nature of the adaptation.

Table 1. Changes in key physiological outcomes following 12 weeks of ACE or cycle ergometer training in older adults (reproduced from Pogliaghi et al., 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Change on cycle ergometer test</th>
<th>Change on ACE test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE training</td>
<td>Peak power (W)</td>
<td>↑12 (8%)</td>
<td>↑19 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\dot{V}O_2$peak (L·min$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>↑0.21 (9%)</td>
<td>↑0.37 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peak $O_2$ pulse (mL·beat$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>↑1.5 (10%)</td>
<td>↑2.4 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power at VT (W)</td>
<td>↑5 (5%)</td>
<td>↑10 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\dot{V}O_2$ at VT (L·min$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>↑0.09 (5%)</td>
<td>↑0.19 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle training</td>
<td>Peak power (W)</td>
<td>↑26 (18%)</td>
<td>↑4 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\dot{V}O_2$peak (L·min$^{-1}$)</td>
<td>↑0.39 (18%)</td>
<td>↑0.16 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak O₂pulse (mL·beat⁻¹)</td>
<td>↑2.4 (17%)</td>
<td>↑1.2 (10%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power at VT (W)</td>
<td>↑19 (19%)</td>
<td>↑3 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V̇O₂ at VT (L·min⁻¹)</td>
<td>↑0.21 (13%)</td>
<td>↑0.07 (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data shown are absolute changes in the mean with relative changes in parentheses. Specific effects shaded in grey, cross-transfer effects not shaded.

**Clinical populations**

In light of the work of Pogliaghi et al. (2006), many clinical applications of UBX become apparent. For example, ACE cardiopulmonary testing is useful to evaluate the physical capacity of people with lower extremity impairments caused by vascular, orthopaedic or neurological conditions. Thus, UBX may also form an important part of clinical rehabilitation programmes in conditions such as spinal cord injury, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), peripheral arterial disease (PAD), stroke and chronic heart failure.

**Example 1 – UBX training in COPD**

A common lung disease, COPD is characterised by airflow obstruction that is not fully reversible. Associated with breathing difficulty (dyspnoea), exercise intolerance and impaired quality of life, pulmonary rehabilitation plays an important role in the management of COPD. Pulmonary rehabilitation using UBX is recommended as part of the exercise training component as it has a positive impact on exercise capacity, arm strength and reduced symptoms of dyspnoea (Ries et al., 2007). Typical arm training exercises for people with COPD include ACE, upper-body resistance training and overhead tasks. These activities are simple to incorporate into pulmonary rehabilitation programmes, and may be very relevant to people who frequently experience dyspnoea.

**Example 2 – UBX training in PAD**

Lower-limb PAD is a medical condition characterised by atherosclerotic narrowing of the arteries supplying the legs. A common symptom of PAD is intermittent claudication, which is a cramp-like leg pain that occurs during walking due to insufficient muscular blood flow. Intermittent claudication impairs quality of life by limiting ambulation and activities of daily living. Regular walking exercise improves functional outcomes in people with intermittent claudication; however, since walking can be painful, the desire and ability of these patients to perform such activity might be limited. Three small-to-moderate sized clinical trials have demonstrated that arm cranking is a well-tolerated alternative training modality, which can induce similar improvements in pain-free and maximum walking distances as compared with lower-limb exercise modalities (Tompra et al., 2015). These studies used an interval training approach of 2 minutes of moderate-to-hard exercise at 50-60 rev·min⁻¹, followed by 2 minutes of passive recovery, for duration of 40-60 minutes. Interval training was favoured to continuous training primarily because it allowed for a higher-intensity of exercise to be performed, thus maximising the potential for a cross-transfer effect to walking ability. Training was 2-3 times per week for 12-24 weeks.

**Handcycling**

The most specific application of ACE is to the sport of handcycling. Since its introduction to the Paralympic Games as a demonstration event in 2004 its popularity has soared, both competitively and recreationally. Individuals are able to use specifically constructed handbikes, or clip-on devices that attach to any rigid wheelchair. Propulsion technique is typically achieved using a synchronous pattern. Importantly this liberating exercise mode assures inclusion even for profoundly disabled athletes.
As with able-bodied endurance events there are a range of physiological variables that help us to understand performance. For example, Janssen et al. (2001) tested handcyclists in both a 10-km road race and a range of variables from incremental treadmill tests. They reported race intensities of 80 and 88% heart rate reserve for those racers with upper-limb dysfunction and those without, respectively. Peak aerobic power output, $\dot{V}O_2$peak and gross efficiency were important determinants of race performance. Furthermore, the extent of physiological strain suggested this exercise mode was well suited to aerobic training.

**Conclusions and recommendations:**
Upper body exercise has several useful applications. Basic guidelines for arm-crank exercise testing and training are provided below. Guidelines for other UBX modes exist and should be considered wherever relevant.

**Example ACE testing protocols for older adults and clinical populations**
- 5-minute warm-up at 40 W, followed by step increases of 5 W·min$^{-1}$ until maximum volitional exertion (Pogliaghi et al., 2006)
- or
- 1 minute of resting measurements, followed by 2 minutes of unloaded arm cranking at 60-70 rev·min$^{-1}$, and then a ramp of 5-15 W·min$^{-1}$ until maximum volitional exertion (Janaudis-Ferreira et al., 2012)

**Example ACE training protocols for older adults and clinical populations**
- Interval training: Accumulate 10-20 minutes of “hard” exercise, using a 1:1 work-rest ratio, and intervals lasting 1-3 minutes. A practical starting point for “work” intervals is the power output associated with VT, with progression occurring to heart rate and perceived exertion responses recorded towards the end of each interval.
- Continuous training: Start at power associated with 90% VT or 50% peak power determined on an initial ramp cardiopulmonary exercise test, and complete a session of 20 to 30 minutes duration.

**Handcycling**
- Guidelines for novice handcyclists are very similar to those presented for ACE above. The main difference is in body position: during ACE individuals typically adopt an upright seated posture, while a handcyclist will either sit in a recumbent position or kneel, depending on the nature and extent of disability. For highly trained, competitive individuals it is likely that stated work rates could easily be doubled compared to those reported herein for clinical and/or elderly individuals.

**References:**


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