Reliability of a Test Battery Designed for Quickly and Safely Assessing Diverse Indices of Neuromuscular Function

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Introduction

- Spaceflight affects nearly every physiological system

- Spaceflight-induced alterations in physiological function translate to decrements in functional performance
Introduction

• Challenge:
  – How do we develop countermeasures to offset the plethora of physiological decrements?

• Solution:
  – Identify the physiological factors most critical for functional outcomes
  – Develop countermeasures targeted toward the most critical factors
Introduction

Functional Performance
- Seat Egress and Walk
- Ladder Climb
- Construction Activity
- Rock Translation
- Torque Generation
- Jump Down
- Recovery from Fall/Stand

Physiological Measures
- **Muscle**
  - Strength
  - Power
  - Endurance
  - Control
  - Neuromuscular Drive
- **Sensorimotor**
  - Posture
  - Gait
  - Dynamic Visual Acuity
  - Fine Motor
- **Cardiovascular**
  - Plasma Volume
What “Neuromuscular Performance Variables” Do We Assess?

• Redundant strength is a hallmark consequence of spaceflight
  – Strength is strongly associated with functional performance (Visser et al. 2000)
  – “Neural factors” (e.g., central activation) clearly contribute to unloading-induced strength loss (Clark et al. 2006)

• Power is perhaps the strongest predictor of functional performance (Puthoff et al. 2008)

• Force steadiness might relate to functional performance (Seynnes et al. 2005; Manini et al. 2005)
Purpose

• To develop a test battery for quickly and safely assessing diverse indices of neuromuscular performance
  – Quickly:
    • Battery of tests must be completed in ~30 min
  – Safely:
    • Increased susceptibility to muscle damage after spaceflight
    • Impaired postural stability post-spaceflight
  – Diverse indices:
    • Strength
    • Central activation
    • Power
    • Endurance
    • Force steadiness
Methods

• Subjects
  – 10 healthy volunteers (5 women, 5 men)
  – Age: 31 ± 5 y
  – Height: 173 ± 11 cm
  – Weight: 73 ± 14 kg

• Procedures
  – Completed a battery of neuromuscular performance tests on 3 occasions separated by at least 48 h
Knee Extension Tests

Test #1: Interpolated Twitch Test
   –Central Activation

Test #2: Force Steadiness Test
   –With and without Visual Feedback
Leg Press Tests

Test #3: Maximal Isometric Force Test
- Maximal Strength
- Rate of Force Development

Test #4: Power Endurance Test
- Maximal Power
- Fatigue Index
- Total Work
**Bench Press Tests**

**Test #5:** Maximal Isometric Force Test  
- Maximal Strength  
- Rate of Force Development

**Test #6:** Force Steadiness Test  
- With and without Visual Feedback

**Test #7:** Power Endurance Test  
- Maximal Power  
- Fatigue Index  
- Total Work
Statistical Analyses

• Reliability of each test was assessed via
  – Standard error of the measurement (SEM)
    • SEM reported as percent of the mean
  – Intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC)

• Time required to set up and conduct each test is reported as mean ± SD
# Results: Knee Extension Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>ICC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpolated Twitch</td>
<td>Central Activation Capacity (%)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force Steadiness</td>
<td>Force Steadiness with Visual Feedback (CV)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Force Steadiness without Visual Feedback (CV)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results: Leg Press Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>ICC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force</td>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force (N)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rate of Force Development (N/ms)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Endurance</td>
<td>Maximal Power (W)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatigue Index (%)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Work (J)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Results: Bench Press Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>ICC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force</td>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force (N)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rate of Force Development (N/ms)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force Steadiness</td>
<td>Force Steadiness with Visual Feedback (CV)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Force Steadiness without Visual Feedback (CV)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Endurance</td>
<td>Maximal Power (W)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatigue Index (%)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Work (J)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results: Time Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing Device</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knee Extension</td>
<td>ITT Current Optimization</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpolated Twitch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Force Steadiness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leg Press</td>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power Endurance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench Press</td>
<td>Maximal Isometric Force</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Force Steadiness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power Endurance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

• Purpose: To develop a test battery for **quickly** and **safely** assessing **diverse indices** of neuromuscular performance
  – **Quickly:**
    • Battery of tests can be completed in ~30-40 min
  – **Safely:**
    • No eccentric muscle actions or impact forces
    • Tests present little challenge to postural stability
  – **Diverse indices:**
    • Strength: Excellent reliability (ICC = 0.99)
    • Central activation: Very good reliability (ICC = 0.87)
    • Power: Excellent reliability (ICC = 0.99)
    • Endurance: Total work has excellent reliability (ICC = 0.99)
    • Force steadiness: Poor reliability (ICC = 0.20 – 0.60)
Acknowledgments

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