The Relationship Between Muscle Quality and Age: Influence of Pennation Angle

Joseph G. Rosenberg, Eric D. Ryan, Eric J. Sobolewski, Michael J. Scharville, & Gilbert E. King

Department of Exercise and Sport Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between muscle quality obtained through panoramic mode ultrasound (US) imaging and age when controlling for pennation angle. Methods: Fifteen young (mean ± SD) (age, 22 ± 2 years; height, 175.3 ± 7.8 cm; body mass, 76.5 ± 9.8 kg) and 15 old (age, 70 ± 3 years; height, 177.2 ± 6.0 cm; body mass, 83.0 ± 12.3 kg) healthy, recreationally active males participated in this research study. PA and EI of the MG were measured by panoramic brightness mode ultrasonography. PA was assessed as the angle between the fascicle and a line parallel to the deep aponeurosis, while EI (a gray-scale value) was assessed from a cross-sectional scan of the MG. Results: A significant relationship was observed between age and EI (P<0.001), which was unaffected when controlling for PA (r=0.64; P=0.001). Conclusions: These results indicate that age-related changes in EI reflect alterations in tissue quality (i.e. increased in connective and adipose tissue) rather than changes in PA.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have suggested that echo intensity (EI; a measure of muscle quality) increases with aging (Arts et al., 2010; Fukumoto et al., 2012). However, because of the anisotropic nature of muscle, it is possible that this relationship is due to pennation angle (PA) rather than muscle quality (Strasser et al., 2013). In principle, reflection of an acoustic wave is strongest, when the propagation direction of the wave is perpendicular to the surface of an object. Thus, the smaller the pennation angle of the muscle, the greater the expected echo intensity of the muscle region. Although muscle quality may appear as a promising clinical tool, factors that influence this measure warrant further evaluation.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS: Fifteen healthy, recreationally active young (mean ± SD) (age, 22 ± 2 years; height, 175.3 ± 7.8 cm; body mass, 76.5 ± 9.8 kg) and older males (age, 70 ± 3 years; height, 177.2 ± 6.0 cm; body mass, 83.0 ± 12.3 kg)

PROCEDURES: Transverse and longitudinal ultrasound images of the medial gastrocnemius (MG) at 30% limb length of the right limb were obtained with a portable B-mode ultrasound imaging device (GE Logiq e; WI, USA) and a multi-frequency linear-array transducer (38.4-mm FVQ; 12L-RS) using LogicView™ software. A region of interest from the MG was selected to include as much of the muscle as possible without any surrounding fascia (Fig. 3). PA was assessed as the angle between the fascicle and a line parallel to the deep aponeurosis and the average value of 2 separate fascicles was used for all analyses. EI was determined using the standard histogram function and gray-scale analysis in Image-J software (National Institutes of Health, USA). Mean EI of the region of interest was expressed as a value between 0 and 255 (black = 0; white = 255).

RESULTS

A significant relationship was observed between age and EI (P=0.07; P<0.001), which was unaffected when controlling for PA (r=0.64; P<0.001). The results of the ANCOVA performed to control for pennation angle between both groups. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.0 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Table 1: Participant anthropometrics and muscle characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Young Males</th>
<th>Older Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>22 ± 2</td>
<td>70 ± 3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height (cm)</td>
<td>175.3 ± 7.8</td>
<td>177.2 ± 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Mass (kg)</td>
<td>76.5 ± 9.8</td>
<td>83.0 ± 12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA (deg)</td>
<td>16.2 ± 2.4*</td>
<td>16.2 ± 2.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI (a.u.)</td>
<td>74.3 ± 5.6</td>
<td>91.3 ± 8.5*</td>
</tr>
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</table>

EI: echo intensity; PA: pennation angle; *: Significant difference between groups (P<0.05)

There was a positive relationship between muscle quality (i.e. EI) and age, which was not influenced by pennation angle. Rather, other mechanisms associated with the aging process appear to be responsible for the reductions in muscle quality observed within the medial gastrocnemius. These findings indicate that age-related changes in EI reflect alterations in tissue quality (i.e. increase in connective and adipose tissue) rather than changes in pennation angle.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: Future studies may use EI derived muscle quality to examine the influence of exercise interventions, pathological adaptations, and/or age-related alterations in various populations.

REFERENCES

