Maximal Lipid Oxidation (Fat_{max}) in Physical Exercise and Training: A review and Update

Abbass Ghanbari-Niaki*, Navabeh Zare-Kookandeh

1. Exercise Biochemistry Division, Faculty of Sport Sciences, University of Mazandaran, Baboulsar, Iran.

ABSTRACT

The exercise intensity, at which the maximal fat oxidation (MFO) rate occurs, has been defined as Fat_{max}. It has been suggested that the fat oxidation rate during the Fat_{max} intensity is approximately 2-fold greater than at any other intensity although modifiable by several physiological conditions (training, previous exercise or meal). There are a few standardized protocols for estimating of Fat_{max}. The most common tests include: Cycle Ergometer (CE) and Treadmill (TM). Reviewing of tables of the study appoint that the extent of weight or fat loss in response to exercise training varies among individuals.

KEY WORDS: Maximal Fat Oxidation, Fatmax, Cycle Ergometer, Treadmill.

INTRODUCTION

The exercise intensity that causes the highest rate of fat oxidation is referred to as the ‘maximal fat oxidation rate’ (Fat_{max}) intensity (1). It is possible to reproduce measurements of Fat_{max} using graded exercise calorimetry (2). This approach can be used to predict the quantity of lipid that will be metabolized during exercise. It has been suggested that the fat oxidation rate during the Fat_{max} intensity is approximately 2-fold greater than at any other intensity (3).

Thus, the Fat_{max} intensity is recommended to maximize the beneficial effects of exercise and weight management.

Below 25% of VO_{2max}, fat has been reported to be the major energy supply for the muscle. Above this level, glycogen will rapidly become the predominant fuel, but fat oxidation will still increase until the Lipoxmax/Fat(ox)max is reached. Above this level, it decreases. The reasons for this decrease are not completely understood. Theoretically, lipid supply by lipolysis, lipid entrance in muscle cell, lipid entrance in mitochondria, and mitochondrial fat processing may all be limiting steps. Experiments show that extracellular lipid supply is not limiting, since lipid oxidation decreases even if additional fat is provided to the cell.

Limiting steps seem to be the entrance into mitochondria, governed by CPT-I, which can be inhibited by Malonyl-CoA and lactate (4), and possibly downstream CPT-I other mitochondrial enzymes such as Acyl-CoA synthase and electron transport chain. All these steps are sensitive to the rate of CHO oxidation and thus, a rise in CHO oxidation seems to depress lipid oxidation despite availability of fat and presence of all the enzymes of fat oxidation. Conversely, there is a wide body of evidence that glycogen...
depletion reverses this inhibition and thus increases fat oxidation, as observed during long duration glycogen-depleting exercise.

The maximum fat oxidation rate is defined by genetics, exercise habits, exercise type, degree of obesity and type of obesity (visceral fat or subcutaneous fat). Furthermore, the total fat oxidation rate in terms of exercise (total fat oxidation rate during exercise + post-exercise recovery period) may vary according to exercise intensity, exercise period (length of exercise), meal intake (on an empty stomach or after a meal) and meal content (percentage of fat or carbohydrates in the meal) before the exercise.

Variations in maximum fat oxidation rate, according to the presence of exercise habit and type of exercise, have been reported by the authors (5).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Measurement of fat oxidation rate**

Formulae for the fat oxidation rate and carbohydrate oxidation rate have been created by experimental means for more than 100 years.

Fat oxidation rate (mg/min) = 1.695 × oxygen uptake (l/min) − 1.701 × carbon dioxide output (l/min)

Carbohydrate oxidation rate (mg/min) = 4.585 × carbon dioxide output (l/min) − 3.226 × oxygen uptake (l/min)

These formulae can be used to ascertain the fat oxidation rate with a device analysing expired gas, or by entering measurements of oxygen uptake and production of carbon dioxide into the formula.

**FATMAX test protocol**

There are a few standardized protocols for estimating of Fatmax. The most common tests include: Cycle Ergometer (CE) and Treadmill (TM)

**Cycle Ergometer (CE)**

For this protocol all participants should complete a FATMAX test (6) during the preliminary trial to establish maximal oxygen uptake (VO2max). In more detail, the test protocol generally involves a 5 min warm up at 75 W on an electronically braked cycle ergometer. The test started at 95 W, every 3 min the effort increase in incremental steps of 35 W, until voluntary exhaustion reached. During each stage of the test respiratory gas measurements (VO2 and VCO2) should be collected using an Gas Analyzer. Test stop if 2 out of the 4 following criteria met. 1) if VO2 do not increase even when workload increase (< 2 mL·kg−1·min−1 increase from the previous stage) 2) a respiratory exchange ratio (RER) of >1.05 3) a heart rate within 10 beats per min of age predicted maximal heart rate 4) a cadence of 50 rpm cannot be maintained. Heart rate (HR) should record during each stage of the test using a HR monitor (Table 1).

**Table1. Studies at the Fatmax with CE protocol currently available.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>year</th>
<th>Exercise mode</th>
<th>subject</th>
<th>Fatmax</th>
<th>MFO (maximal fat oxidation) rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X Chenevie`re et al. (7)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>32 healthy volunteers men trained versus an untrained</td>
<td>trained 58.3% VO2max, untrained 29.4% VO2max</td>
<td>trained 0.72 g.min−1, untrained 0.32 g.min−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Achten et al. (6)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>18 moderately trained cyclists</td>
<td>61 ±3 VO2max, 72 ±2 HRmax</td>
<td>CE: 0.66 ±0.06 g.min−1, CE: 0.69 ± 0.06 g.min−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U Andersson Hall et al. (8)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>elite cyclists and triathletes</td>
<td>CON: 55 ± 2 VO2max, EXER: 62 ± 1 VO2max, FAST: 62 ± 2 VO2max</td>
<td>CON: 0.51 ± 0.04 g.min−1, EXER: 0.89 ± 0.05 g.min−1, FAST: 0.69 ± 0.04 g.min−1, CON : submaximal incremental EXER: two repetitions of 20 min cycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study ID</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Fat Oxidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>24 male recreationally trained: high fatness group, low fatness group</td>
<td>75% of VO2max</td>
<td>Low fatness: 46.7 ± 8.6 VO2max 65.9 ± 4.9 HRmax High fatness: 45.4 ± 7.2 VO2max 62.2 ± 6.4 HRmax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>9 healthy moderately trained females</td>
<td>High Fat: 0.42±0.14 g/min-1 High CHO: 0.29±0.13 g/min-1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>T2DM group (12 women) and a control group (12 women)</td>
<td>T2DM group: 0.39 g/min Control:0.58 g/min</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Nine healthy overweight males</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Ten young healthy men</td>
<td>Fat oxidation was maximal at am</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>136 non-diabetic obese</td>
<td>Lipid contribution (mg min⁻¹ FFM¹) 25W: 7.6 50W(3min): 5.6 50W(3min): 5.2 50W(3min): 5.5 75W: 1 In OB pubertal group was highest</td>
<td>G1:151.6 ± 36.7 mg/min G2:143.9 ± 38.4 mg/min G3:164.6 ± 50.6 mg/min G1: MFO intensity; G2: 60% of VO2-peak intensity; G3: free moderate-intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>upright CE</td>
<td>39 pre-pubertal girls 37 pubertal girls</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Sixteen L and 16 O men</td>
<td>L (lean): 54% vo2peak O (obese): 42% vo2peak</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Fifteen healthy, moderately trained male volunteers</td>
<td>Pre: 0.31 0.03 g/min Post:0.21 0.07 g/min</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Forty-one healthy women [premenopausal (n =19), perimenopausal (n =8), and postmenopausal (n =14)]</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>16 male cyclists</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CE</td>
<td>middle-aged obese men</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>TM vs CE</td>
<td>22 early pubertal children (9 girls and 13 boys)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

F: Besnier et al. (14) 2015 CE 136 non-diabetic obese

G1:151.6 ± 36.7 mg/min G2:143.9 ± 38.4 mg/min G3:164.6 ± 50.6 mg/min G1: MFO intensity; G2: 60% of VO2-peak intensity; G3: free moderate-intensity

**References:**

**Fatmax, Exercise and Training**

Treadmill (TM)

A standardized protocol should use for all treadmill FATMAX tests. In more detail, the test can start at 5.0 km·h⁻¹ and at a gradient of 1% for three min. The speed then increase to 7.5 km·h⁻¹. Speed increase by 1 km·h⁻¹ every 3 min until an RER of 1 reached thereafter the speed remain constant and the gradient increase by 1% every 1 min until voluntary exhaustion. Respiratory gas measurements (2 and 2) should collect continuously using a Moxus Modular system. Furthermore, HR should measure throughout the whole test and rating of perceived exertion (RPE) record during each stage (Table 2). The final point of test is similar to the previous protocol (CE).

RESULTS

Lipoxmax values are different and can be modifiable by some factors such as gender (33, 34), puberty (35, 36), Training status (37-39), Obesity (40, 41) and diabetes (42). Lanzi et al. (2014) used Sixteen L (lean) and 16 O (obese) men for their study (16). They
reported that subjects (obese men) reached their Fatmax point in CE protocol at \( %42 \) VO\(_{2}\text{peak} \) whereas in Tan et al. (2015) study, subjects’ s Fatmax (Twenty-six obese boys) occurred at \( %43\pm11 \) VO\(_{2}\text{max} \) by TM protocol (43). In another study twelve women with T2DM when reached their Fatmax by CE protocol, their MFO rate was about 0.29 g/ min (11) while A Cataldo et al. (2014) reported that individuals in their study (Fifteen sedentary T2D patients) showed 6.71\( \pm \)0.46 mL/kg/min (MFO rate) at their Fatmax point (44).

As well as in Coso et al. (2010) study subjects (endurance-trained ) achieved at 60% peak oxygen uptake at their Fatmax point with a CE protocol (30) whereas in another study when endurance trained individuals reached their Fatmax point with a CE protocol , their VO2max was about 62.5\( \pm \) 9.8 (32) and also Rami et al. (2014) when used a TM protocol for their subjects (Active male students ), they observed that subjects achieved their Fatmax when their VO2max was about 40.09\( \pm \)2.58 (45).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>year</th>
<th>Exercise mode</th>
<th>subject</th>
<th>Fatmax</th>
<th>MFO (maximal fat oxidation) rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J Zakrzewski et al. (46)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>12 OW and 15 NO girls</td>
<td>Over Weight: 52 ± 10 VO2max non Over Weight: 63 ±12 VO2max</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Rami et al. (45)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Active male students</td>
<td>Active :60.9±2.58 VO2max</td>
<td>0.29±0.03 g.min(^{-1})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC. Venables et al. (39)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>300 healthy men and women</td>
<td>48.3 (\pm) 0.9 VO2max</td>
<td>7.8 (\pm) 0.13 (FFM)(^{1}) g.min(^{-1})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Takagi et al. (47)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>healthy young men</td>
<td>43.2 (\pm) 5.7% VO2peak</td>
<td>0.65 (\pm) 0.12 g.min(^{-1})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Rami et al. (48)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>9 untrained male</td>
<td>42 (\pm) 3 VO2max</td>
<td>0.73 g.min(^{-1})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA Crisp et al. (49)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>overweight boys (8–12 years)</td>
<td>58±2 VO2max</td>
<td>0.44 g.min(^{-1})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Mousavian et al. (50)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>untrained female university students</td>
<td>Morning: 40.92±6.17 g/m Afternoon: 55.83±3.55 g/m Night: 57.19±3.11 g/m</td>
<td>Morning: 0.30±0.051 g/m Afternoon: 0.45±0.082 g/m Night: 0.44±0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Darvakh et al. (51)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>4Tnon4TYT-athletes/9T male students</td>
<td>Morning: 4.92±4.17 ml/kg/m Afternoon: 13.83±5.55 ml/kg/m Night: 10.99±5.96 ml/kg/m</td>
<td>Morning:0.05±0.17 g.min(^{-1}) Night: 0.53±0.17 Night: 0.037±0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Konishi et al. (52)</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>healthy young males</td>
<td>18.7 (\pm) 0.8 ml/kg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Iwayama et al. (53)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Nine young male endurance athletes</td>
<td>Maximal: 5.5 kcal/min At 7-7.5 am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Robinson et al. (54)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>53 young, healthy men</td>
<td>MFO (g/min) was significantly and positively correlated with 24 h fat oxidation (24 h FO, g/d),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Tan et al. (43)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Twenty-six obese boys and 20 lean boys</td>
<td>Obese boys: Control: 0.41±0.18 g/min Exercise: 0.38±0.13 g/min Lean boys: Control: 0.29±0.12 g/min Exercise: 0.32±0.17 g/min</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Wang et al. (55)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>graded treadmill walking/running test</td>
<td>Control: Rest:0.10 ± 0.04 4km/h: 0.32 ± 0.10 5km/h: 0.18 ± 0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thirty women</td>
<td>Exercise:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fatmax, Exercise and Training


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author et al.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exercise mode</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Fatmax</th>
<th>MFO (maximal fat oxidation) rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S S Ferreira</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Walking Test</td>
<td>adult women</td>
<td>51.3 ± 7.2 VO2max</td>
<td>0.303 g.min⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAG Freitas</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>12 obese women</td>
<td>self-selected exercise intensity 62.0 ± 10.2 VO2max</td>
<td>0.372 ± 0.08 g.min⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDS Silveira</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>running protocols</td>
<td>Sixteen recreational athletes Males (n = 9) Females (n = 7)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fat peak test 1: 0.52 g.min⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Alkahtani</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>The 30-min MIIT involved 5-min repetitions of workloads 20% below and 20% above the MFO intensity.</td>
<td>Twelve sedentary obese males</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Fat peak test 2: 0.49 g.min⁻¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Makni</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>six-minute walking distance (6MWD) - cycle ergometer = for fatmax</td>
<td>131 school-aged obese children, 68 boys and 63 girls</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Boy: 126.5±2.1 ng min⁻¹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Studies at the Lipoxmax with other protocol currently available.
CONCLUSION
Nowadays the most important question for population that wants to lose weight is what is the easiest and fastest method to lose the maximum weight. \( \text{Fat}_{\text{max}} \) may be an efficient exercise intensity for weight loss programs, health-related exercise programs, and endurance training. Several authors assume that ‘‘fat loss depends on energy deficit only, independently of the method for weight loss’’ (66). Studies clearly indicate that is quite possible to lose fat while preserving fat-free mass through regular prolonged exercise of moderate intensity and if energy intake is kept constant at baseline level (67). They also confirm the importance of the individual differences in response to negative energy balance. It is well appointed that the extent of weight or fat loss in response to exercise training varies among individuals (68-70). Future research should be modifiable by some factors such as gender, puberty, training status, obesity and diabetes.

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
We wish to thank Dr. R. Fathi (Department of exercise Physiology, University of Mazandaran, Iran), Dr A. Zare Kookandeh (Sahid Rajaee hospital, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran), Mr A. Shirazi (Department of exercise Physiology, University of Mazandaran, Iran) for helpful comments and guidance.


