



Exploring Activity-Induced Lactate Pharmacokinetics: Implications for Minimally-Invasive Monitoring

A Literature Review

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1. Introduction

1.1. Sports applications of lactate monitoring

The monitoring of lactate levels holds significant importance in diagnosing and assessing various health conditions [1], including lactate acidosis and situations characterized by oxygen deficit, where lactate levels exceed accepted norms [2]. Although many medical applications, the demand for lactate monitoring solutions comes mainly from the sports domain. Lactate monitoring is instrumental in gauging training intensity and evaluating an athlete's endurance [3, 4]. Exercise-induced muscle fatigue is a reversible loss of muscle force (or muscle contractility) during work over time [5]. Human *in vivo* studies have demonstrated conspicuous concomitances between muscle lactate and proton concentrations, cellular pH, and muscle fatigue [6, 7]. Whether these concomitances reflect cause-effect relationships is still debated. Lactate has not been shown to cause muscle fatigue directly. Muscle lactate is, with interleukin-6 [8], a well-known and relevant biomarker of exercise-induced muscle fatigue [9–11]. Understanding and monitoring lactate levels allows athletes to adapt their training plans, optimize their workouts, prevent overtraining, and ultimately enhance their performance in their respective sports. Coaches and sports scientists interpret lactate data accurately and design training programs tailored to their needs and goals [3, 12].

Currently, lactate detection is mainly performed using blood sampling analyzers [13]. The most known hand-held blood lactate analyzers are the Lactate Pro, the Lactate Pro2, the Lactate Scout+, the Xpress, and the Edge [14]. Although reliable and accurate measurements are performed with such devices [14, 15], athletes must stop moving for blood collection from their fingertips or earlobes. Moreover, for lactate and any biomarkers, blood sampling is uncomfortable for users, cannot be used for continuous measurement, and is relatively expensive.

1.2. Microneedles technology for lactate monitoring

In recent years, developing non-invasive or minimally-invasive biosensors for continuous lactate monitoring has raised strong interest in wellness and sports applications. The two body fluids mainly considered by researchers to carry out these non-invasive measurements are sweat [18] and interstitial fluid (ISF) [19]. For detection in ISF, recent technology has proven its potential: microneedles [20]. Microneedles have been developed for various applications, including drug delivery, biosensing, and vaccination. They offer a minimally-invasive and user-friendly alternative to conventional needles, causing less pain and lower tissue damage [21]. Microneedles are fabricated using different techniques and materials, resulting in various types such as solid, dissolving, coated, and hollow microneedles [22]. In recent years, 3D printing has emerged as a promising technique for fabricating microneedle arrays, enabling point-of-care biosensing applications [21]. Additionally, microfluidic technology has been used to control the porosity of polylactic acid porous microneedles, allowing for adjustable ISF extraction efficiency [23]. Due to the small dimensions of microneedles (less than 1 mm in length), they penetrate the stratum corneum without reaching deep into the subcutaneous tissue, unlike the needle sensors used in commercially available CGM devices

Extracellular Fluid (14L-17L)	Intracellular Fluid (25-28 L)
Blood Plasma (2-3 L)	Blood Cells (2 L)
Interstitial Fluid (9-13.5 L)	Tissue Cells (23 L)

Figure 0.1: Distribution of water in the human body showing the approximate volume of blood plasma and ISF in the extracellular fluid compartment, and the volume of tissue and blood cells in the intracellular fluid compartment. From [16]

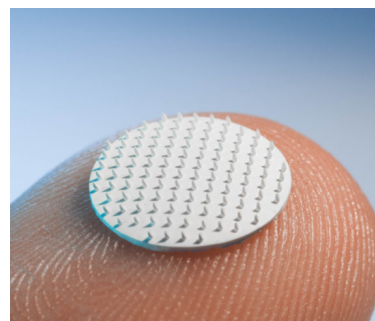


Figure 0.2: Illustration of a microneedles patch. From [17]

[24]. The commercial maturity of minimally invasive biodetection in ISF is asserted yearly. **new biomarkers such as lactate could be monitored non-invasively with the emergence of microneedles biosensors** [25].

1.2. Understanding lactate pharmacology for biosensor development

Understanding biomarkers' behavior in the organism is a prerequisite for biological detection research [27]. Clinical qualification is the evidentiary process of linking a biomarker with biological responses and clinical endpoints [28]. Clinicians evaluate the magnitude of the reason for the clinical cause of this biomarker production and establish a diagnosis. Studying biomarkers pharmacology is therefore essential before designing wearable biosensors.

A considerable body of clinical research has been devoted to glucose pharmacology in human ISF [29]. Although the state of the art is relatively well established for lactate as well [30], the lactic concentrations in the dermal ISF, in particular, remain relatively understudied. However, such clinical knowledge arouses growing interest, as biomonitoring technologies become increasingly mature and able to measure lactate concentrations in the skin painlessly.

The following work reviews the literature on lactate pharmacokinetics in the ISF during physical exercise. This state of knowledge aims to **highlight the relevance or irrelevance of dermal ISF as a medium for physical activity-induced lactate monitoring** and areas of persistent uncertainty.

2. Definitions

2.1. D-lactic acid & L-lactic acid

Lactic acid is a natural organic acid that can take the form of two enantiomers: *l-lactic acid* and *d-lactic acid*. **L-lactic acid is an endogenous compound involved in human energy metabolism** [32]. Tissue sources of l-lactate production include *erythrocytes*¹, *hepatocytes*², *skeletal myocytes*³, skin, and *astrocytes*⁴ [34, 35]. On the other hand, d-lactic acid is produced in some less relevant metabolic pathways or by microorganisms strains [36]. Lactic acid bacteria produce lactic acid in the small intestine and colon [37, 38]. **Blood contains approximately 100 times more l-lactate than d-lactate** [3, 39]. Pathological significance of lactate is almost entirely confined to the l-lactate isoform [40]. It is the isoform routinely measured at the point of care [41] and in the laboratory [42].

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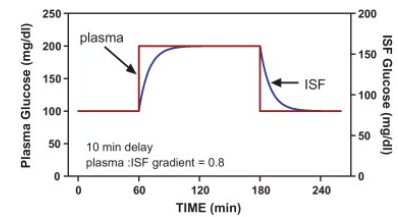


Figure 0.3: The lag time of glucose concentrations in the ISF is around 10 minutes compared with plasma concentrations. From [26]

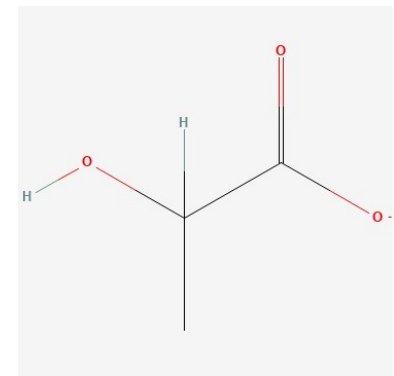


Figure 0.4: 2D Chemical Structure Depiction of Lactate. From [31]

- 1: Erythrocytes are red blood cells.
- 2: Hepatocytes are the chief functional cells of the liver[33].
- 3: Myocytes are muscle cells.
- 4: Astrocytes are a sub-type of cells in the central nervous system

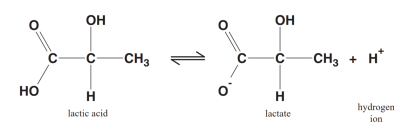


Figure 0.5: The dissociation of lactic acid. From [34]

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3. Lactate metabolism & Cori cycle

3.1. Aerobic respiration & Anaerobic respiration

During rest and light physical activity, oxygen supply to cells is sufficient for *aerobic respiration*. Aerobic respiration is a cellular metabolism process by which cells break down carbohydrates and lipids to generate *adenosine triphosphate*⁹ (ATP) molecules. Glucose molecules are formed from glycogen in the cell or supplied by the GLUT4 transporter from blood [45]. Glucose is broken down during the glycolysis process. *Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide* (NAD⁺) co-enzyme catalyzes this reaction in the cytoplasm. The intermediate metabolite *pyruvate* is produced. If oxygen is abundant in the cell, pyruvate can enter the mitochondria, generating 32 to 38 ATP. Intense exercises cause cellular hypoxia and lead to anaerobic metabolism. *Anaerobic respiration* is the process by which skeletal muscle cells produce energy without oxygen. **The Cori cycle, also known as the Lactic acid cycle, describes the metabolic pathway of lactic acid produced during anaerobic metabolism by skeletal muscle cells** [46]. Instead of entering the mitochondrial matrix, excess pyruvate is catalyzed with Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NADH) by lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) enzyme into lactic acid. LDH has a greater binding affinity for l-lactate than d-lactate [47]. D-lactate is, when present, metabolized at a slower rate.

3.2. Muscle lactate release

High lactic acid production can cause lactic acid acidosis¹⁰ in muscle cells [53, 54]. The monocarboxylate transporter MCT1¹¹ avoid acidosis by evacuating lactic acid from the muscle cell to the blood [56, 57]. Lactate is buffered in plasma by bicarbonate of soda (NaHCO₃) [34]. **Lactic acid accumulates in contracting muscle and blood, beginning around 50-70% of the maximal O₂ uptake**, well before the aerobic capacity is fully utilized [58]. The predominant explanation is that lactate production during submaximal dynamic exercise is not O₂ dependent [59].

3.3. Lactate fate in the organism

Lactate produced during exercise muscle is distributed unevenly throughout the body's different compartments [51]. The anaerobic component of cellular metabolism can be theoretically assessed by measuring lactic flux at the cellular level or the level of the isolated muscle [60]. At the whole organism level, blood measurements are more complex to be relevantly interpreted as a muscle fatigue indicator due to the actions of different bodies on the lactic flux, the action of unused

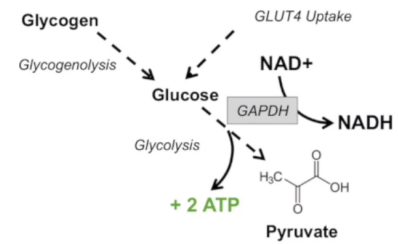


Figure 0.6: Pyruvate production in cells from glucose.

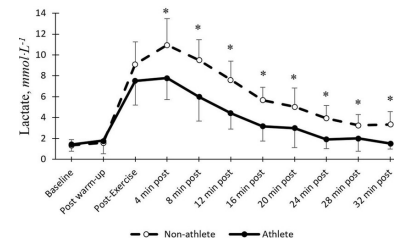


Figure 0.7: Blood lactate response in athletes vs. non-athletes. *Statistically significant difference between athletes vs. non-athletes (adjusted $p < 0.005$). From [43]

9: ATP is the energy source for use and storage at the cellular level [44].

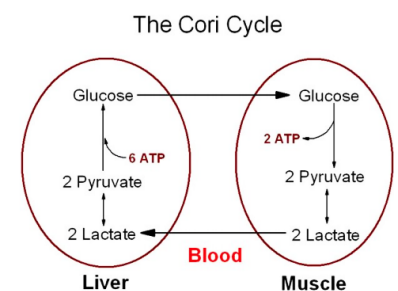


Figure 0.8: Corri cycle schematic overview. From [48].

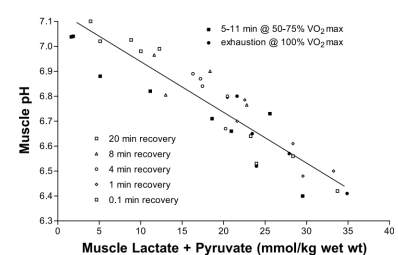


Figure 0.9: Figure redrawn from data from Sahlin et al. [49] (Figs. 1 and 2, p. 46), showing the linear relationship between the sum of muscle lactate and pyruvate vs. muscle pH. Data are combined from different exercise intensities and different durations of recovery after exercise to exhaustion. From [50].

muscles, and the multicompartimental diffusion of lactate [60]. Different compartmental models have been formulated to predict blood lactate concentration ($[La^-]_{blo}$) [61–67]. Although some show promising results, these models have limitations. They usually include many assumptions not applicable to continuous monitoring, such as when the maximum post-exercise $[La^-]_{blo}$ will be reached, a glycogen fixed concentration, or specific stimulation intensities or durations. Although they do not make it possible to formulate complete models, the advances made in recent years provide answers regarding the distribution of lactate in the different compartments of the body.

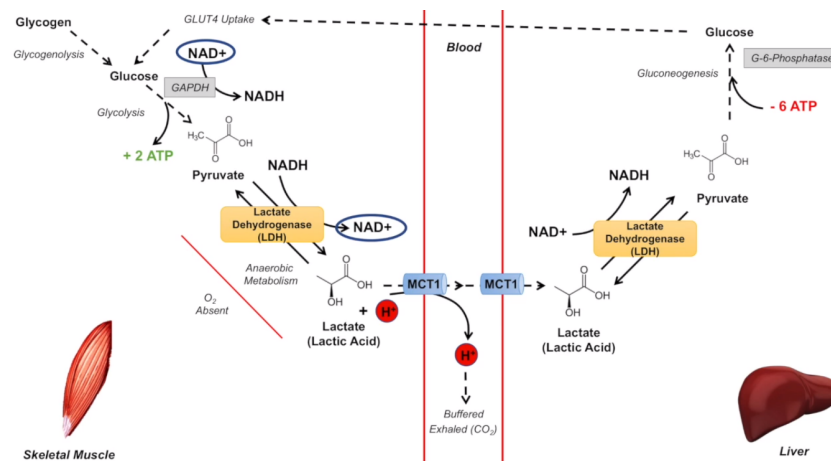


Figure 0.11: Simplified illustration of the Cori cycle. From [68]

4. Lactate pharmacokinetics during exercise

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4.1. Muscle versus blood lactate concentrations

$[La^-]_{blo}$ results from global lactate appearance and disappearance, not only the lactate appearance and disappearance of the stimulated muscle fibers [6, 69]. The lactate transport from the active muscle to the

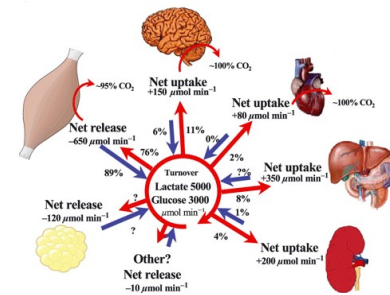


Figure 0.10: Scheme of tissue contributions to systemic lactate turnover in healthy humans during moderate intensity exercise. From [51]

10: Lactic acidosis is defined as a blood lactate concentration of 5 mmol/L and a pH lower than 7.35 [52].

11: Monocarboxylate transporters (MCTs) catalyze the proton-linked transport of monocarboxylates such as L-lactate, pyruvate, and the ketone bodies across the plasma membrane [55].

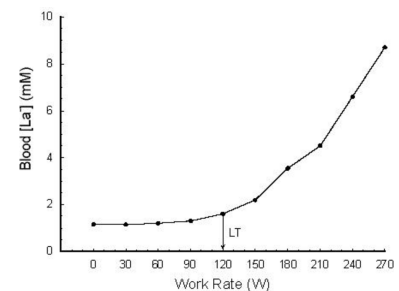


Figure 0.12: A typical $[La^-]_b$ response to a progressive, incremental exercise test. LT represents the “lactate threshold.” These are whole blood measurements corrected for water content. From [3]

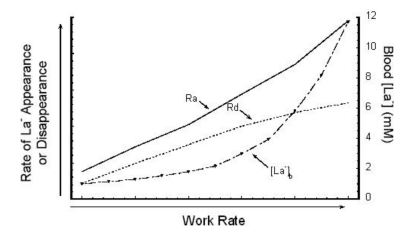


Figure 0.13: Schematic view of Lactate rate of appearance (R_a), Lactate rate of disappearance (R_d), and resulting $[La^-]_{blo}$ during progressive, incremental exercise. From [69]

blood, which depends on the concentration gradient, also plays a role [6]. Despite the complexity of the phenomena to be taken into consideration, numerous pieces of evidence demonstrate that **active muscle lactate concentration** ($[La^-]_{mus}$) presents similar patterns to those of $[La^-]_{blo}$ [70–73].

4.2. Whole blood versus plasma lactate concentrations

Several studies show an inhomogeneous distribution of lactate in blood during graded exercise [74–77]. According to their membrane potential, the erythrocytes' intracellular concentration is lower than the plasma lactate concentration ($[La^-]_{pla}$) [3, 76, 78]. **Consequently, whole $[La^-]_{blo}$ must be differentiated from $[La^-]_{pla}$.** The whole blood-plasma lactate concentration ratio might vary from 63% to 81% depending on plasma water content and hematocrit¹² [3]. **$[La^-]_{pla}$ is, around 1.5 times higher than whole $[La^-]_{blo}$ at rest¹³ [81–83].** This ratio increases during rapid and graded exercise-induced lactate releases [74, 78]. This distinction is a significant issue for blood lactate measurements. Indeed, different lactate analyzers measure plasma or whole blood lactate concentration. **Which concentration is measured by point-of-care devices could be unclear [3].** $[La^-]_{pla}$ is traditionally measured in central laboratories.

4.3. Arterial versus capillary blood lactate concentrations

Arterial blood is the standard sample for laboratory lactate measurement [84]. It gives a reliable indication of global appearance and disappearance [85]. **At rest, arterial lactate and capillary lactate are weakly correlated [83].** Several studies demonstrate that capillary plasma lactate concentration ($[La^-]_{cap}$) and hand-held point-of-care (POC) device measurements are significantly higher than arterial plasma lactate concentration ($[La^-]_{art}$) and its measurements in laboratory [86–88]. The magnitude of this bias varies between studies [85]. Unlike well-validated central laboratory equipment, hand-held POC devices do not provide sufficiently relevant clinical data to draw medical diagnoses [89, 90]. **However, correlation between $[La^-]_{art}$ and $[La^-]_{cap}$ increases during physical exercise [83].** Although capillary blood samples for in-hospital medical diagnostics remain debated, **capillary lactate measurements are consistently usable for sports training applications [83, 91, 92].**

4.4. Absolute capillary blood lactate concentrations versus portable analyzers measurements during exercise

The most important study on commercialized portable blood lactate analyzers since 2015 was led by J. M. Bonaventura et al. [93]. They realized a comparative study on five hand-held blood lactate analyzers. They tested the devices on venous blood samples. **The devices' reliability was generally lower than 0.5 mM for concentrations of 1.0 to 10 mM.** For all five portable analyzers, the analytical error within a brand was much smaller than the biological variation in venous blood lactate. **Compared with a criterion blood lactate analyzer, all portable analyzers tend to under-read (i.e., a negative bias), particularly evident at the highest concentrations (15 to 23 mM) [93, 94].**

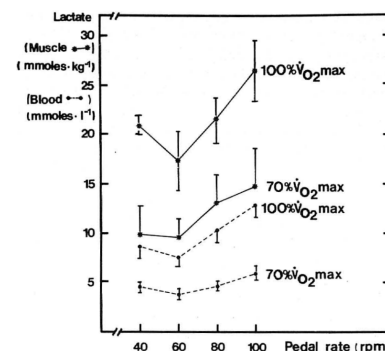


Figure 0.14: $[La^-]_{mus}$ (stars) and $[La^-]_{blo}$ (dots) for submaximal (70%Vo2max) and maximal (100%Vo2max) exercise intensity in six healthy male subjects during bicycling exercises. From [70]

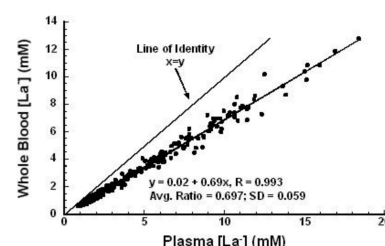


Figure 0.15: Whole $[La^-]_{blo}$ versus corresponding $[La^-]_{pla}$. SD: standard deviation of $[La^-]_{blo}$ to $[La^-]_{pla}$ ratio. N = 324 blood samples. From [3]

12: The hematocrit is the volume percentage of red blood cells in blood

13: In comparison, plasma glucose values are about 10% - 15% higher than whole blood when the hematocrit is normal [79, 80].



Figure 0.16: Picture of the Lactate Pro 2, a commercially available blood lactate analyzer.

4.5. Capillary blood versus interstitial lactate concentrations

The inherent biological attributes of ISF complement its practical advantages. Analytes in interstitial fluid (ISF) come from the blood through continuous capillaries¹⁴. Pores of their lining only allow small solutes, under approximately 70kDa, to pass across the capillary wall[95, 96]. Lactate molecular weight being 90 Da, it highly diffuses into the ISF and **Lactate ISF concentration ($[La^-]_{ISF}$) has a nearly 1:1 ratio correlation with $[La^-]_{cap}$ [30].** ISF biomarker concentrations are similar to plasma concentrations for low molecular weight species, and the blood-to-ISF lag time is between 5 to 15 minutes [30].

4.6. Dermal interstitial lactate concentrations

In healthy people, skin lactate concentration at rest is between 1 and 2.5 mmol/l [99]. **Resting dermal $[La^-]_{ISF}$ is in average about 30% higher than arterial $[La^-]_{pla}$ [99, 100].** Indeed, $[La^-]_{pla}$ at rest comprises between 0.5mmol/l and 2mmol/l in healthy humans, depending on people and time [101]. Like other tissues, the skin releases lactate. Skin contributes about 5% at rest to the whole-body lactate turnover [97]. However, despite the high proportion of whole-body lactate production by skin, **the evolution over time at rest of skin lactate concentration appear to reflect the evolution of the plasma concentration relatively well [97].** The efficient blood-ISF bilateral diffusion of lactate seems to explain this correlation. As for glucose, lactate is subject to the inherent plasma-to-ISF lag [30]. An insufficient number of physiological studies address this delay for lactate. However, recent non-commercialized microneedle-based lactate biosensors suggest **a measured lag time of approximately 10 minutes relative to plasma variations [102, 103].** The subcutaneous depth of the capillary plexus varies between 0.6 and 1.5 mm, depending on the on-body location [104]. Consequently, the delay between $[La^-]_{ISF}$ at the microneedles location and $[La^-]_{pla}$ may vary depending on the on-body location and Microneedles subcutaneous depth.

To our knowledge, **no study deals with the correlation between dermal $[La^-]_{ISF}$ and arterial $[La^-]_{pla}$ during exercise.** However, the net production of lactate by the muscles increases drastically during exercise compared to other organs, including the skin [51]. Consequently, the correlation between $[La^-]_{ISF}$ and $[La^-]_{pla}$ is probably better during exercise than at rest. Further studies remain necessary to quantify this correlation and possible parameters to be considered, such as the location on the body of the dermal ISF sampling and its proximity to the producing muscles. In addition, the dermal lactic concentration could vary depending on the depth under the skin. Krogstad et al. suggest a possible negative linear relationship between the catheter location in the dermal tissue layer and dermal $[La^-]_{ISF}$ during microdialysis measurements [105]. **Further studies are needed to confirm and quantify the influence of the microneedles depth of a minimally-invasive lactate monitoring device.**

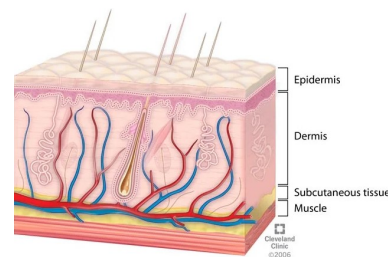


Figure 0.17: Schematic representation of the skin layers.

14: Depending on the location, continuous capillaries are generally the most present in the skin, and the least porous capillary type.

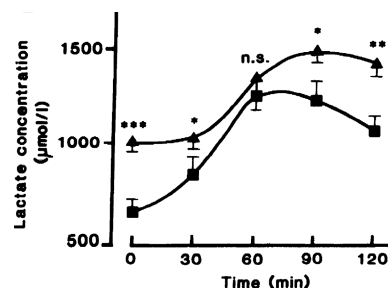


Figure 0.18: Evolution of $[La^-]_{pla}$ (square) and dermal $[La^-]_{ISF}$ (triangle) during an oral glucose tolerance test. From [97]

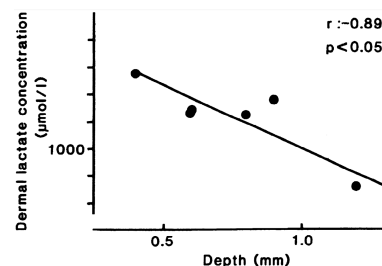


Figure 0.19: Measurement (n=6) of dermal concentration in either abdominal or forearm skin depends on the dermal tissue's catheter depth according to a linear relationship ($R=-0.89$, $P < 0.05$). From [97]

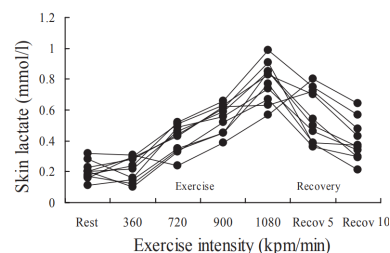


Figure 0.20: Lactate concentration of skin surface on working muscle at rest, during cycle exercise and recovery when one subjects performed the same exercise ten times. From [98]

5. Conclusion

We provide a comprehensive literature review on lactate pharmacology in the human body and lactic concentrations in ISF during physical exercise. This state-of-the-art analysis contributes to understanding lactic acid evolution and ISF monitoring during physical effort. This investigation of lactate diffusivity status aims to provide synthesized and actionable information to biosensor developers. The main takeaways are synthesized below.

During exercise, lactate is mainly released from muscle tissue. Synthesized by skeletal muscle cells, lactate diffuses throughout the body from the ISF of muscle cells to plasma, then from capillary vessels to the subcutaneous and dermal ISF. Lactate's low molecular weight and high diffusivity suggest similar and correlated concentrations in extracellular fluid [30]. Few data are available on lactic acid concentrations in the skin and their variations during physical effort. Despite a consortium on the correlation between blood and interstitial concentrations, uncertainties in measurements of dermal ISF concentration remain greater than for glucose [106]. Depth in the dermis seems to have an impact on measured levels. Hydration may also be a factor in blood-tissue lactate crosstalk [106]. These parameters must be investigated to characterize the medical relevance of its monitoring in dermal ISF. **Further studies on lactate pharmacology are required to develop relevant, accurate, minimally-invasive lactate biosensors.**

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