

REVIEW

Energy expenditure in different patient populations on intensive care: One size does *not* fit all

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Abstract

Objective: Adequate nutrition has an impact on outcome in critically ill patients. This descriptive literature search investigates whether there are differences in energy expenditure (EE) between specific subgroups of critically ill patients, including patients with sepsis, trauma, burns and cerebrovascular accidents. Also, we summarised specific factors which may influence EE, such as the use of sedation, body temperature and severity of illness.

Design: A descriptive review of studies which have measured EE or oxygen consumption with indirect calorimetry in critically ill patients. Studies were retrieved by a systematic search of the Medline database, using search terms referring to the measurement (energy expenditure), the patient population in general (critically ill patients), and to the four specific subgroups (sepsis, trauma, burns, stroke).

Results: EE in patients with sepsis, trauma and burns was increased (sepsis 102-198%; trauma 110-168%; burns 137-182%; stroke 149% for men and 120% for women) compared with reference values of EE in healthy individuals. Burn patients had the highest EE levels. There was no difference in EE between sepsis and trauma patients. Patients with a cerebrovascular accident had the lowest EE. Half of these patients had an EE that did not exceed EE levels in healthy adults. Use of sedation lowered EE whereas fever increased EE. Uncertainty persists whether treatment of stroke patients with hypothermia decreases EE. According to most studies, higher disease severity scores are associated with higher EE, but one study found that severity of illness is negatively correlated with EE in sepsis.

Conclusions: Data for this review were limited, precluding definite conclusions. However, it is clear EE differs among critically ill patient populations. The use of a 'one size fits all' formula to estimate caloric need in the critically ill may not be appropriate in the design of studies on caloric need nor in patient care.

Introduction

In critically ill patients, meeting caloric demand by adequate nutrition is related to better outcome.¹ Therefore, adequately responding to the nutritional demands of patients admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) should be a daily goal in patient care. However, the optimal amount of calories that should be prescribed to critically ill patients has been a matter of debate.¹

It is thought that the consumption of calories, termed energy expenditure (EE), is increased in critically ill patients compared with the general hospital population, due to high metabolic demands during various inflammatory conditions.² A disbalance between high demands and limited energy supply may contribute to organ failure and adverse outcome in ICU patients.^{3,4} In this view, underfeeding could be detrimental. An alternative hypothesis relating to the optimal amount of calories holds that this hypermetabolic state might be harmful and that hypocaloric nutrition reduces hypermetabolism,⁵ thereby improving outcome.⁶ In both strategies, measuring or estimating energy demands of patients are crucial in determining the optimal amount of feeding.

The EE can be measured in several ways, including indirect calorimetry. Alternatively, the Harris-Benedict equation is used, which calculates the amount of calories needed in ICU patients and estimates an individual's basal metabolic rate, multiplied by an activity factor.⁷ A shortcoming of this formula is the controversy about what exactly this activity factor should be.⁸⁻¹⁰ Also, the formula does not distinguish between specific ICU patient populations. Comparing caloric targets based on the calculated caloric need with use of this formula^{6,11} may therefore lead to inadequate conclusions in ICU patients.

Given the relation between caloric supply and outcome, it seems paramount to be aware of possible EE differences between different subgroups. This paper summarises data from all available studies which have directly measured EE in four specific subgroups of ICU patients: sepsis, trauma, burns and cerebrovascular accident (CVA).

Methods

The Medline database was used to identify medical subject's headings (MeSH) and select search terms. In addition to MeSH terms, free text words were used. Search terms referred to the measurement: energy expenditure (*calorimetry, indirect [MeSH]; energy metabolism [MeSH]; energy metabolism; energy expenditure; indirect calorimetry*), to the patient population in general: critically ill patients (*critical illness [MeSH]; intensive care unit [MeSH]; critical care [MeSH]; intensive care [MeSH]; critical care; intensive care unit; critical illness; ICU patients*) and to the four specific subgroups: (*septic shock [MeSH]; bacteremia [MeSH]; sepsis [MeSH]; sepsis; pyemia; septicemia; blood poisoning; severe sepsis; bacteremia; septic shock; (wounds and injuries [MeSH]; trauma; wounds and injuries; severe trauma); (burn, chemical [MeSH]; burn [MeSH]; burn; chemical burns; electric burns; burn wounds); (brain ischemia [MeSH]; cerebral infarction[MeSH]; subarachnoid hemorrhage [MeSH]; intracranial hemorrhage [MeSH]; stroke [MeSH]; stroke; cerebrovascular apoplexy; CVA; cerebrovascular accident; brain infarction; cerebral ischemia; intracranial hemorrhage; subarachnoid hemorrhage; SAH*). Search results were limited to adults. Studies were selected when data on EE (kcal/day) or oxygen consumption (VO₂) (ml/(min.m²)) were provided. If not otherwise mentioned, measured EE refers to resting EE. When EE or VO₂ of individual patients were given, mean and SD were calculated. Kilojoules were converted by using the equation 1 kcal = 4184 kJ. When only EE/ kg body weight was given, EE was calculated by multiplying by the mean body weight of the patient group. In that case, no SD could be calculated. To facilitate comparisons of metabolism between groups, all measurements of EE in the subgroups of critically ill

patients were compared with a reference value of EE or VO₂ as measured in healthy adult men and women¹² and expressed as a percentage of that reference value. If the male/female (M/F) proportion of a study group was given, EE was corrected for the M/F ratio, by multiplying the number of male patients with the reference value of a healthy male and the number of female patients with the reference value of a healthy female, divided by the total number of patients. If no M/F ratio was given, an M/F ratio of 3/1 was used, because this ratio corresponded best with the M/F ratios in the studies of EE in sepsis, trauma and burns groups where this ratio was given. The normal VO₂ range is 110-160 ml/(min.m²). The effect of several clinical conditions was investigated, including body temperature, use of sedation and disease severity. Severity of illness was estimated using either the Acute Physiology and Chronic Health Evaluation (APACHE) II or III score,^{24,25} Injury Severity Score (ISS)^{26,27} or the percentage of body surface area (%BSA) that was burned for burn patients only.

Results

The Medline search yielded 361 studies. Of these, 338 were not suitable because data on measured EE or VO₂ were not given for the specific patient subgroups under study, leaving 23 studies with data on EE or VO₂ in patients with sepsis (n=10), sepsis and trauma (n=3), trauma (n=3), trauma and burns (n=1), burns (n=3) and CVA (n=3). In total, EE measurements in 448 patients were included.

Comparison of EE and/or VO₂ between different patient groups

In patients suffering from sepsis (*table 1*), all studies except one¹³ found an increase in measured EE with values ranging

Table 1. Caloric demand in critically ill patients with sepsis

References	Number of patients	Male/F	EE (kcal/ day)	% of reference EE	VO ₂ (ml/(min.m ²))
Frankenfield et al. ²²	20	17/3	3395 ± 634	198%	-
Koea et al. ²⁹	4	3/1	2196 ± 440	132%	-
Rusavy et al. ³⁰	20	Unknown	2116 (No SD)	127%	-
Liggett et al. ^{9*}	18	Unknown	1982 ± 97	119%	-
Clark et al. ³¹	11	Unknown	1950 ± 175	117%	-
Kiiski et al. ³²	21	16/5	1960 ± 486	117%	-
Uehara et al. ³³	12	8/4	1859 ± 485	114%	-
Basile-Filho et al. ¹³	15	11/4	1699 ± 271	102%	-
Schaffartzik et al. ³⁴	30	Unknown	-	-	173 ± 30
Fernandes et al. ³⁵	10	10/0	-	-	168.9 ± 63.1
	5	5/0	-	-	144.0 ± 30.5
Hanique et al. ³⁶	14	9/5	-	-	163 ± 19
Natalini et al. ³⁷	10	Unknown	-	-	157 ± 35
Zauner et al. ²³	14	8/6	-	-	135 ± 26
Total	204			102-198 %	

Data are mean ± SD; M/F = proportion male/ female; *In Liggett et al., EE was measured using a pulmonary artery catheter.

from 102-198% compared with the reference value. Three out of the six VO₂ measurements were high, but within the normal range. The other VO₂ measurements slightly exceeded the normal range.

In the trauma group (*table 2*), all studies reported high EE measurements, ranging from 110-68% compared with the reference value. Of the VO₂ measurements, one study reported values within the normal range (153.6 ml/(min.m²),¹⁴ other studies reported VO₂ values higher than 160 ml/(min.m²). In the patient population suffering from burns (*table 3*), EE measurements ranged from 137-182% of the reference values. Two studies reporting VO₂ measurements exceeded the normal range, with values of 131 and 209% compared with the upper limit of the normal range of oxygen consumption of 160 ml/(min.m²).^{15,16} In stroke patients (*table 4*), increased levels of EE of 149% of the reference value for men and 120% for women were found in one study.¹⁷ However, the two other studies^{18,19} found no increased EE levels compared with the reference value. In this patient group, no VO₂ measurements were available.

Clinical conditions influencing EE

The use of sedative medication generally lowers EE.^{20,21} However, one study showed a positive correlation between sedative dose and EE.²² Different types of sedative medication

did not result in differences in EE levels when measurements were corrected for body temperature.²¹

An increase in EE caused by fever was found in sedated head-injured patients²¹ and in septic patients.²³ Conversely, induced hypothermia to 33 °C resulted in a significantly lower EE in stroke patients.¹⁸ However, not all studies report such a decrease, as Badjatia *et al.* found no significant differences in EE between the hypothermic (33.5-35.5 °C) and the normothermic (36.5-37.0 °C) stroke patients.¹⁷ In this study, shivering as a result of treatment with hypothermia was clearly shown to increase EE.¹⁷

The severity of illness may influence EE. EE was related to either the APACHE II or III for sepsis,^{24,25} ISS for trauma^{26,27} or %BSA for burn patients (*table 5*). Not all studies mentioned severity scores. In general, however, patients with higher severity scores were more hypermetabolic, which was most distinct in patients with burns.^{8,16} An association between severity of illness and EE was also noted in septic trauma patients.²² One study, however, reported a negative correlation between APACHE III scores and resting EE in sepsis.²³

Discussion

EE measurements were highest in burn patients, with all studies reporting substantially higher values than reference

Table 2. Caloric demand in critically ill patients with trauma

References	Number of patients	M/F	EE (kcal/ day)	% of reference EE	VO ₂ (ml/(min.m ²))
Frankenfield et al. ²²	13	10/3	2754 ± 401	168%	-
Bruder et al. ²¹	24	19/5	2496 ± 574	148%	203 ± 55
Stucky et al. ³⁸	21	Unknown	2263 ± 599	136%	-
Kiiski et al. ³²	25	17/8	2071 ± 430	126%	-
Uehara et al. ³³	12	9/3	1953 ± 416	117%	-
Raurich et al. ^{10*}	Total: 26				
	20	15/5	1900 ± 394	114%	-
	20	15/5	1840 ± 311	110%	-
Huschak et al. ¹⁴	15	14/1	-	-	165.9 ± 21.2
	18	13/5	-	-	153.6 ± 30.4
Total	154			110-168 %	

Data are mean ± SD; M/F = proportion male/ female; *In Raurich et al., 40 EE measurements are reported for 26 patients in total. One group of measurements was compared with 20 surgical patients, the other to 20 medical patients.

Table 3. Caloric demand in critically ill patients with burns

References	Number of patients	M/F	EE (kcal/ day)	% of reference EE	VO ₂ (ml/(min.m ²))
Gore et al. ¹⁵	6	Unknown	3030	182%	209 ± 27
Khorram-Sefat et al. ⁸	27	27/0	2878 ± 407	172%	-
Royall et al. ¹⁶	22	17/3	2319 ± 553	139%	335 ± 80
Stucky et al. ³⁸	12	Unknown	2284 ± 508	137%	-
Total	67			137-182 %	

Data are mean ± SD; M/F = proportion male/ female.

Table 4. Caloric demand in critically ill patients with cerebrovascular accident

References	Number of patients	M/F	EE (kcal/ day)	% of reference EE
Badjatia et al. ¹⁷	50	16/34	-	-
		Male	2647 ± 1013	149%
		Female	1622 ± 596	120%
Bardutzky et al. ^{18*}	10	4/6	1549	102%
Bardutzky et al. ^{19*}	34	20/14	1568	98%
Total	94			98 – 149 %

Data are mean ± SD; M/F = proportion male/ female; *In Bardutzky et al., total EE is given instead of resting EE.

Table 5. Energy expenditure and the illness severity scores in different patient populations

References	% of reference EE	
Sepsis patients		
Clark et al. ³¹	117	APACHE II score
		24
		23
Uehara et al. ³³	114	16 – 34
Basile-Filho et al. ¹³	102	22.6 ± 7.2
Trauma patients		
		Injury severity score
Frankenfield et al. ²²	168	33 ± 9
Bruder et al. ²¹	148	27 ± 9
Stucky et al. ³⁸	136	22.18 ± 16.42
Kiiski et al. ³²	126	22 ± 20
Uehara et al. ³³	117	26 – 50
Burn patients		
		Injury severity score
Stucky et al. ³⁸	137	29.83 ± 10.55
Burn patients		
		% of BSA burned
Gore et al. ¹⁵	182	72 ± 9.8
Khorram-Sefat et al. ⁸	172	51 ± 20
Royall et al. ¹⁶	139	36.7 ± 18.8
Stucky et al. ³⁸	137	40.85 ± 36.35

Data are given in mean ± SD.

EE values. Also, EE values of burn patients were higher than EE values in most studies describing sepsis or trauma patients. A probable explanation is that burned patients are highly hypermetabolic and catabolic.²⁸ In both the sepsis and trauma patient populations we found increased EE values compared with the EE levels in healthy adults. Patients suffering from sepsis do not have consistently higher EE values than trauma patients. As expected, EE measurements in the CVA group were lowest, with two out of three studies (50% of the patient population) not reporting increased EE compared with healthy adults.^{18,19} This may be due to the fact that in these patients an inflammatory state is not as apparent as in sepsis, trauma or burn patients. Taken together, there are profound differences in EE between specific patient populations, with burn patients

having the highest EE values. A large variation was also observed within subgroups of patients, as well as a large variety between different studies.

The use of sedation was generally found to decrease EE in critically ill patients, without apparent differences between types of sedative medication.^{20,21} As expected, fever increases the levels of EE.^{21,23} The use of induced hypothermia seems to decrease EE.¹⁸ One study found no significant difference in EE between normothermia and hypothermia, which was attributed by the authors to the heterogeneity of the patient population.¹⁷ The positive correlation between body temperature and EE can be explained by thermogenesis. Of note, we found that EE was positively correlated to the severity of illness in the majority of the reviewed studies, suggesting that within a specific clinical condition, also disease severity should be taken into account when estimating the caloric need. However, it should be considered that variation was large.^{8,16,22}

Given the differences in EE between patient populations as well as the variance within patient groups, we feel it would be best to measure the EE in each individual patient when assessing the amount of nutrition. When predictive equations are used instead of indirect calorimetry, factors can be added correcting for the patient's type of lesion and for clinical conditions such as the use of sedation, severity of illness and body temperature. However, various recommendations on estimating EE in patients have been made. According to some, predicting the individual EE by using an equation is not possible, because of the variation in EE in critically ill patients and the quantity of factors influencing EE.¹⁰ Therefore, it was proposed to use the same predictive equations for all patients without adding factors. On the other hand, others hold that factors attributing to differences in energy expenditure between critically ill patients should be better understood to allow more accurate estimation of the caloric needs of individual patients.²¹ In burned patients, it was recommended to use equations that do not give higher predictions of EE than 1.5-1.6 times basal EE to avoid overfeeding.⁸ Taken together, there is no consensus on what the correcting factors should be. The summary of our findings points towards a patient-tailored approach, taking into account the clinical condition as well as disease severity.

Besides patient care, our findings may also have implications for future research. In studies comparing the impact of hyper- versus hypo-caloric nutrition on outcome, it should be considered that EE differs between patient populations. The use of predictive equations in such studies is inappropriate in predicting the actual EE and thus the caloric demand of individual patients. However, some of these studies claim a relation between predictive equations and outcome.^{6,11} When the 'less than goal' and 'near goal' amount of calories is based on those predictions and is related to outcome, results may be confounded. Therefore, indirect calorimetry seems the best way to estimate the nutrition status of a patient and provide tailored care to possibly improve outcome.

There are several limitations to this review. The amount of data on measured EE or VO₂ is limited. Thereby, patient numbers are small. The most important limitation is that statistical analysis of the data was limited as individual patient data were not available, rendering this study a descriptive review. Also, the ratio between male and female was not always given. Most collected measurements were performed during the first week. Thereby, variations in EE during the course of illness were not detected.²³ As individual energy expenditure can fluctuate significantly from day to day,²² this may influence the reliability of the comparison of EE measurements in the current study. However, EE is largely stable in the course of the first week.^{18,19,23} As we did not perform consecutive measurements, conclusions of this study only pertain to the first week following admission. Another limitation is that several factors such as age, body weight, types of nutrition, presence of shock, administration of medications such as insulin or inotropics and the use of mechanical ventilation were not considered. Patients and circumstances were quite heterogeneous and EE measurements were not corrected for that. However, we corrected for sex, which importantly determines EE.⁷ There is a great need for collecting more data to improve the limited knowledge, before adapting this in daily ICU care. Future research should ideally include the influence of mechanical ventilation and inotropic drugs on EE values.



Nonetheless, this study attempts to give an indication of differences in EE between four distinct groups of patients. Despite the limitations of this study, results may have implications for estimating energy expenditure in clinical practice and for research goals.

Conclusion

Energy expenditure differs between and within patient populations. The use of sedatives, body temperature and severity of illness have an impact on EE values. The use of the same formula to calculate caloric need for each patient may not be appropriate.

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