

**Local NOS inhibition reduces skeletal muscle glucose uptake but not capillary blood flow during in situ muscle contraction in rats**

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Running title: NOS inhibition and capillary flow during contractions

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Received for publication 1 June 2007 and accepted in revised form 15 September 2007.

## **ABSTRACT**

*Objective:* We have shown previously in humans that local infusion of a nitric oxide synthase (NOS) inhibitor into the femoral artery attenuates the increase in leg glucose uptake during exercise without influencing total leg blood flow. However, studies in rodents examining the effect of NOS inhibition on contraction-stimulated skeletal muscle glucose uptake have yielded contradictory results. This study examined the effect of local infusion of a NOS inhibitor on skeletal muscle glucose uptake (2-deoxyglucose) and capillary blood flow (contrast enhanced ultrasound) during in situ contractions in rats.

*Research design and methods:* Male hooded Wistar rats were anesthetized, then one hindleg electrically stimulated to contract (2Hz, 0.1ms) for 30 min while the other leg rested. After 10 min the NOS inhibitor N<sup>G</sup>-nitro-L-arginine methyl ester (L-NAME; arterial concentration of 5 $\mu$ M) or saline was infused into the epigastric artery of the contracting leg.

*Results:* Local NOS inhibition had no effect on blood pressure, heart rate or muscle contraction force. Contractions increased ( $P<0.05$ ) skeletal muscle NOS activity and this was prevented by L-NAME infusion. NOS inhibition caused a modest significant ( $P<0.05$ ) attenuation of the increase in femoral blood flow during contractions but importantly there was no effect on capillary recruitment. NOS inhibition attenuated ( $P<0.05$ ) the increase in contraction-stimulated skeletal muscle glucose uptake by ~35%, without affecting AMPK activation.

*Conclusions:* NOS inhibition attenuated increases in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during contraction without influencing capillary recruitment suggesting that nitric oxide is critical for part of the normal increase in skeletal muscle fiber glucose uptake during contraction.

**Keywords:** Nitric oxide, AMPK, blood flow, glucose uptake.

The uptake and metabolism of glucose by skeletal muscle is the major determinant of whole body glucose homeostasis (1). People with type 2 diabetes have normal levels of the glucose transporter GLUT-4 in skeletal muscle but attenuated GLUT-4 translocation to the plasma membrane in response to insulin (1). This insufficient GLUT-4 translocation is a major contributor to the reduced insulin-stimulated skeletal muscle glucose uptake in people with type 2 diabetes (1). Importantly, however, skeletal muscle GLUT-4 translocation (2) and glucose uptake (3) during exercise (i.e. contraction) are normal in people with type 2 diabetes. The intramuscular signaling pathways associated with glucose uptake during exercise, which are not fully understood, differ from the insulin-mediated pathway(s). Possible signaling candidates include calmodulin-dependent protein kinase (CaMK), AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) and nitric oxide (NO).

We have evidence in humans that NO is critical for normal increases in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during exercise. In our first study, young healthy men cycled for 30 min at a moderate intensity (60%  $\text{VO}_2$  peak) with either the NOS inhibitor  $\text{N}^G$ -monomethyl L-arginine (L-NMMA) or saline infused into the femoral artery from 10 min onwards (4). Femoral artery and vein blood samples were obtained and leg blood flow was determined by thermodilution in the femoral vein. These methodologies are advantageous as they allow measurements to be determined *during* the exercise, without the need to stop contractions, and also no increases in blood pressure with L-NMMA are observed (4). We allowed exercise to take place for 10 min before we started infusion of L-NMMA (or saline) so that normal increases in leg glucose uptake (~30-fold) and leg blood flow (~10-fold)

could take place before the infusions began. NOS inhibition significantly attenuated the increase in leg glucose uptake during exercise by ~40% at 15 min of exercise compared with the saline infusion without influencing leg blood flow or arterial glucose and insulin concentrations (4). This inhibitory effect appeared to be reversed by infusion of the NOS substrate, L-arginine (4). We then showed that L-NMMA attenuated the increase in leg glucose uptake without influencing leg blood flow in people with type 2 diabetes and that this effect of NOS inhibition was significantly greater in people with type 2 diabetes than in controls (75% reduction at 15 min in the people with type 2 diabetes vs 34% in the controls) (3). These two studies suggested that NO was critical for normal increases in GLUT-4 translocation and therefore glucose uptake during exercise since blocking NO production substantially reduced leg glucose uptake without affecting leg blood flow. However, changes in leg blood flow can be independent of muscle microvascular (capillary) perfusion (5) and capillary perfusion may play a critical role in the control of glucose uptake (6).

Studies in rodents examining the effect of NOS inhibition on glucose transport/uptake with exercise/contraction have yielded contradictory results (7-12). Three studies found that NOS inhibition reduced skeletal muscle glucose uptake associated with contraction (8; 10; 12) and three found that it did not (7; 9; 11). The possible reasons for the discrepant findings in those studies have been discussed in detail in a recent review (13). It is worth noting that in most of these rodents studies glucose uptake was examined *after*, rather than during, the

exercise bout/contractions (13). In addition, the conflicting results between studies may have been due, at least in part, to the experimental model that was used (eg in vitro vs in situ etc), whether the NOS inhibitor was present during or after the contractions, whether the buffer was capped or continuously gassed during muscle incubations, the muscle(s) being examined, the fiber type of the muscles being examined, the route of delivering of the NOS inhibitor and whether male or females rats were used (13).

Therefore in this study we examined whether local infusion of a NOS inhibitor attenuated the increase in glucose uptake *during* contraction in situ in rats. We used contrast-enhanced ultrasound (CEU) for measurement of capillary blood volume. The CEU method has revealed that contractions increase both capillary blood volume (capillary recruitment) and capillary flow rate (14). We hypothesized that NOS inhibition would attenuate the normal increase in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during contractions without influencing muscle capillary blood flow.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### *Animals*

Male hooded Wistar rats weighing  $247 \pm 2$  g were reared in the University of Tasmania animal house and allowed free access to standard laboratory rat chow (21.4% protein, 4.6% lipid, 68% carbohydrate and 6% crude fibre with added vitamins and minerals) and water *ad libitum*. All animals were housed at a constant temperature of  $21 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$  and kept on a 12-h light/dark cycle. The experiments and procedures used were approved by the University of Tasmania Animal Ethics Committee. All experiments were conducted using the

anesthetized rat model as described previously (5; 14; 15).

### *Contraction and NOS inhibition*

The experimental protocol is shown in Fig. 1. There were two formats of this protocol, **a** and **b**. Both formats **a** and **b** shared the following details: Electrical stimulation (0.1 ms impulse at 2 Hz and 35 volts) was commenced at  $t = 0$  min. Local infusion of L-NAME was commenced at  $t = 10$  min via the epigastric artery of the stimulated (test) leg to achieve  $5 \mu\text{M}$ . In format **a**, a bolus of radioactive 2-deoxyglucose was injected at  $t = 20$  min and muscle were removed at  $t = 30$  min. Femoral blood flow (FBF) was recorded throughout the protocol, and these data were consequently used during format **b** as a guide for the local infusion of L-NAME which was adjusted according to the FBF to allow a final concentration of  $5\mu\text{M}$  in the hindlimb. FBF measurements could not be made in **b** due to microbubble infusion interfering with the Doppler signal of the transonic flow probe. In format **b**, contrast enhanced ultrasound (CEU) measurements of capillary perfusion were made by microbubble (MB) infusion immediately before electrical stimulation (basal,  $t = 0$  min), during electrical stimulation (prior to L-NAME infusion) at  $t = 10$  min, and during electrical stimulation and L-NAME infusion at  $t = 30$  min; these required MB infusion over the periods indicated in Fig. 1. Muscles were removed at  $t = 30$  min, frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at  $-80^\circ\text{C}$  until required.

### *Contrast-enhanced ultrasound*

Details were essentially as described by Dawson et al. (14) with some minor modifications. The lower leg muscles (gastrocnemius, plantaris and soleus) of

the hindlimb were imaged in short axis with a linear-array transducer connected to an ultrasound system (L7-4 transducer, HDI-5000, ATL Ultrasound). Pulse inversion imaging was performed at a mechanical index of 0.8 to destroy and image microbubbles with the same pulse (14; 16). The acoustic focus was placed at the mid-muscle level, and gain settings were optimized and held constant throughout the experiment. Octafluoropropane gassed microbubbles with a phospholipid shell (prepared in-house) were infused through the right jugular vein at 40  $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$ . Intermittent imaging was performed using pulsing intervals (PI) from 0.5 to 15 s to allow incremental microvascular (capillary) replenishment with microbubbles between each pulse until the volume within the beam was completely refilled (17). Several frames were acquired at each PI. Data were transferred to an offline computer and analyzed using QLAB<sup>TM</sup> software (Version 2.0, Phillips Ultrasound, Bothwell). The ultrasound intensity in decibels within the region of interest were converted to acoustic intensity and after background subtraction using 0.5s ultrasound images (thus removing signals from the large rapid flow vessels) a pulsing interval (time) versus acoustic-intensity curve were plotted (see typical trace, Fig 3) to allow calculation of capillary volume (A) as well as capillary flow rate (A  $\times$   $\beta$ ) according to the equation  $y = A(1 - e^{-\beta(t-0.5)})$  where y is the acoustic intensity at a given pulsing interval (16-18).

#### *Muscle glucose uptake*

At 10 min before the completion of each experiment (Fig. 1) a 1.85-MBq bolus of 2-deoxy-D-[1-<sup>14</sup>C] glucose (<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG specific activity 1.92 TBq/mmol; Amersham Life Science, Castle Hill,

NSW, Australia) in saline (isotonic, 154 mmol/l NaCl) was administered via the right jugular vein. Immediately after the administration of the [<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG an arterial blood sample (0.5mL) was withdrawn by an automated syringe pump at 50 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$  over 10mins. From this blood sample a plasma sample (25 $\mu\text{L}$ ) was collected to determine the average plasma specific radioactivity of [<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG. At the conclusion of the experiment the lower leg muscles from the test and contralateral legs were freeze-clamped *in situ* using liquid nitrogen-cooled tongs and stored at -80°C. Muscle samples were ground under liquid nitrogen and 100mg of muscle tissue was homogenized with 1.5ml water. Free and phosphorylated [<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG were separated by ion exchange chromatography using an anion exchange resin (AG1-X8, Bio-Rad Laboratories, CA). Biodegradable Counting Scintillant-BCA, (Amersham Life Science, USA) was added to each radioactive sample and radioactivity determined using a liquid-scintillation counter (Perkin Elmer Inc., Tri-Carb 2800TR, IL). From this measurement and knowledge of plasma glucose and average plasma radioactive [<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG, muscle [<sup>3</sup>H] 2-DG, which reflects glucose uptake into the muscle, was calculated.

#### *Skeletal muscle Nitrate and Nitrite (NO<sub>x</sub>) levels*

Frozen muscle was ground under liquid nitrogen into a powder and homogenized (1:20 wt/vol) in freshly prepared ice-cold buffer A: (50mM Tris at pH 7.5 containing 1mM EDTA, 10% v/v glycerol, 1% v/v Triton X-100, 50mM NaF, 5mM Na<sub>4</sub>P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub>, 1mM PMSF, 1 $\mu\text{L}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$  trypsin inhibitor and 5 $\mu\text{L}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$  Protease Inhibitor Cocktail (P8340, Sigma)). Lysates were spun at 16,000  $\times$  g for 20 min at 4°C and purified by spinning the

supernatant through 10kDa molecular weight cut-off filters (Millipore, NSW, Australia) at  $16,000 \times g$  for 80 min at  $4^{\circ}C$ . Total nitrate and nitrite levels in the purified samples were determined using Nitrate/Nitrite Colorimetric Assay Kit (Cayman Chemical Co., Ann Arbor, MI). Values are expressed relative to the total protein concentration of the purified samples via the BCA protein assay (Pierce Rockford, Il) with BSA as the standard.

#### *Preparation of whole muscle lysates*

For NOS activity, NOS phosphorylation and AMPK signaling, frozen powdered muscle was homogenized (1:10 wt/vol) in freshly prepared ice-cold buffer A containing 1mM DTT. Tissue lysates were incubated on ice for 20 min and then spun at  $16,000 \times g$  for 20 min at  $4^{\circ}C$ . Protein concentration was determined using the BCA protein assay. An aliquot of the whole muscle lysates was solublized in Laemmli sample buffer and frozen at  $-20^{\circ}C$  for later measurement of AMPK signaling.

NOS was affinity purified from whole muscle lysates using 2'5'-ADP sepharose 4B beads (Amersham Biosciences, Piscataway, NJ). Following purification, an aliquot of the ADP-sepharose beads were solublized in Laemmli sample buffer and frozen at  $-20^{\circ}C$  for later measurement of NOS phosphorylation. The remaining ADP-sepharose beads were used to measure NOS activity.

#### *NOS activity assay*

ADP-sepharose beads were added to 100 $\mu$ l of pre-heated ( $37^{\circ}C$ ) assay buffer, which contained (in final concentrations) 50mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 1.15mM NADPH, 4 $\mu$ M BH<sub>4</sub>, 100nM CaM, 0.7mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 10 $\mu$ M L-arginine, 0.63 $\mu$ M FAD, and 3 $\mu$ M L-[U-<sup>14</sup>C]-arginine (Amersham

Biosciences, Piscataway, NJ). Samples were incubated in the presence of either H<sub>2</sub>O or 1mM L-NAME for 10min at  $37^{\circ}C$ , which was within the pre-determined linear range for rat skeletal muscle. The concentration of L-NAME used was sufficient to fully block NOS activity (data not shown), and inter- and intra-assay coefficient of variations were both 9%. NOS activity represents the difference between samples incubated in the absence and presence of L-NAME, and is expressed as pmol of L-[<sup>14</sup>C]-arginine converted to L-[<sup>14</sup>C]-citrulline per minute per mg of protein (pmol.min<sup>-1</sup>.mg protein<sup>-1</sup>).

#### *AMPK Signaling and NOS phosphorylation*

For NOS phosphorylation, equal amounts of purified proteins were subjected to SDS-PAGE. Binding of purified proteins was detected by immunoblotting with either polyclonal rabbit antibodies that recognizes the predominant nNOS $\mu$ pSer<sup>1446</sup> variant in skeletal muscle (19) and the eNOS pThr<sup>1177</sup> antibody (20). For eNOS pThr<sup>1177</sup>, AICAR-stimulated rat heart (0.5mg.g<sup>-1</sup> body weight I.P.) was used as a positive control. Membranes were then re-probed with either anti-nNOS or anti-eNOS mouse monoclonal antibodies (BD Transduction Laboratories, NSW, Australia), respectively. For AMPK $\alpha$  threonine<sup>172</sup> (AMPK $\alpha$  Thr<sup>172</sup>) and ACC $\beta$  serine<sup>222</sup> (ACC $\beta$  Ser<sup>222</sup>) phosphorylation, 90  $\mu$ g of total protein was subjected to SDS-PAGE and binding was detected by immunoblotting with either anti-phospho-ACC $\beta$  Ser<sup>222</sup> polyclonal antibody (19) or AMPK $\alpha$  (Cell Signaling Technology, Hartsfordshire, England). Binding was detected with IRDye<sup>TM</sup> 800-conjugated anti-rabbit IgG (Rockland, Gilbertsville, PA) or IRDye<sup>TM</sup> 680-conjugated anti-

mouse IgG (Molecular Probes, Eugene, OR) secondary antibodies. Direct fluorescence was detected and quantified using the Odyssey infrared imaging system (LI-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, NB). For AMPK signaling, membranes were then stripped (2% SDS (w/v) in 25mM glycine, pH 2.0) and re-probed with IRDye™ 800-labeled streptavidin (Rockland, Gilbertsville, PA) and anti-phospho-AMPK Thr<sup>172</sup> antibody (21). Phosphorylation was expressed relative to protein abundance.

#### *Data analysis and statistical analysis*

All data are expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM. Mean FBF, HR and BP were calculated using 5s sub-samples of the data, representing approximately 500 flow and pressure measurements. Results were analyzed by the SPSS statistical package using two-factor ANOVA (between factor: L-NAME; within factor: contraction) or two-factor repeated-measures ANOVA (between factor: L-NAME; within factors: contraction and time). If the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction, specific differences between mean values were located using the Fisher's least significance difference test. The level of significance was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

## **RESULTS**

### *Force development*

Electrical stimulation resulted in a maximum tension of approx. 320g that decreased to about 250g after 10 min. This level of force development was sustained for the subsequent 20 min of the experimental period and was unaffected by local L-NAME infusion (data not shown).

### *Heart rate and blood pressure*

Heart rate increased ( $P < 0.05$ ) approx. 12% over the initial 15 min of one leg contraction then remained at about 360 beats/min for the duration of the experiment (data not shown). Infusion of L-NAME into one leg had no significant effect on heart rate. Electrical stimulation also increased ( $P < 0.05$ ) blood pressure, however the increase was modest and only approx 10 mmHg (data not shown). Infusion of L-NAME into one leg did not further significantly increase the blood pressure suggesting that any spill-over of the NOS blocker was insufficient to cause systemic effects

### *Leg blood flow*

Electrical stimulation induced contraction caused a marked ( $P < 0.05$ ) increase in FBF (Fig 2A). L-NAME infusion during contraction tended to decrease FBF but this was not significant (Fig 2A). However, if FBF was examined from 10 min onwards, that is, after introduction of the NOS inhibitor, the change ( $\Delta$ ) in FBF from 10 min was significantly reduced with L-NAME infusion during contraction (Fig 2B). Neither electrical stimulation of the test leg nor local infusion of L-NAME into this leg during electrical stimulation had any significant effect on FBF in the contra-lateral control leg (Fig. 2A).

### *Capillary volume and flow velocity*

The ultrasound transducer was positioned over the contracting leg and thus only values for the contracting leg are shown. Contraction increased both the  $A$ -value (capillary volume) and the  $A \times \beta$ -value (capillary flow rate) (Fig. 3). The infusion of L-NAME did not significantly affect capillary volume or capillary flow rate during contraction.

*Muscle glucose uptake*

Contraction caused a marked increase in muscle glucose uptake of about 16-fold relative to the unstimulated control leg (Fig. 4). L-NAME infusion into the contracting leg significantly inhibited this increase by approx 35%. L-NAME had no effect on glucose uptake in the contra-lateral control leg when infused into the test leg. There was no significant difference in blood glucose concentration between the saline and the L-NAME contraction treatments either immediately before contraction (Contraction + saline:  $4.9 \pm 0.1$ ; Contraction + L-NAME:  $4.8 \pm 0.1$  mmol/l) or at the end of the contractions (Contraction + saline:  $5.4 \pm 0.2$ ; Contraction + L-NAME:  $5.1 \pm 0.1$  mmol/l). Similarly, there was no significant difference in plasma insulin concentration either immediately before contraction (Contraction + saline:  $209 \pm 28$ ; Contraction + L-NAME:  $211 \pm 58$  pmol/l) or at the end of the contractions (Contraction + saline:  $246 \pm 43$ ; Contraction + L-NAME:  $218 \pm 46$  pmol/l).

*AMPK $\alpha$  phosphorylation and ACC $\beta$  phosphorylation*

Contraction caused a 2-3 fold increase in AMPK $\alpha$  phosphorylation and ACC $\beta$  phosphorylation and L-NAME infusion during contraction had no effect on the extent of this phosphorylation (Fig. 5). L-NAME infusion had no effect on AMPK $\alpha$  phosphorylation or ACC $\beta$  phosphorylation in the contra-lateral control (rest) leg when infused into the (contracting) test leg (Fig. 5).

*NOS activity, nitrates and nitrites (NO $_x$ ), nNOS phosphorylation and eNOS phosphorylation.*

Contraction significantly increased skeletal muscle NOS activity and this

increase was prevented by L-NAME infusion during contractions (Fig. 6A). A similar response was observed with skeletal muscle NO $_x$  content, although the increase with exercise was not significant (Fig. 6B). Contraction caused a 2-3 fold increase in nNOS phosphorylation and, as was the case for AMPK $\alpha$  phosphorylation, L-NAME infusion during contraction had no effect on the extent of nNOS phosphorylation (Fig. 6C). L-NAME infusion into the contracting test leg had no effect on NOS activity, NO $_x$  content or nNOS phosphorylation in the contra-lateral resting leg (Fig. 6). We were able to observe substantial eNOS phosphorylation in rat heart following IP AICAR administration (as a control), but we could not detect any skeletal muscle eNOS phosphorylation at rest or following contractions (data not shown).

**DISCUSSION**

The major finding of this study was that local NOS inhibition attenuated the increase in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during in situ contractions without influencing muscle capillary recruitment. In addition, AMPK activation was not altered by NOS inhibition suggesting that the reductions in glucose uptake were specific to NO reduction, and not secondary to effects on AMPK. Importantly, local NOS inhibition had no effect on blood pressure or heart rate during contractions which suggests that these effects were due to local and not systemic effects of the NOS inhibitor. In definitively separating capillary blood flow effects from metabolic effects, the important implication is that a NO producing mechanism is activated in muscle by contraction independent of vascular endothelial NO. As such, these findings lend support to other earlier reports of NO donors acting to increase

glucose uptake in isolated incubated muscle (7-9; 22) where the vascular system has no involvement on nutrient and hormone delivery.

Previous studies in rodents examining the effect of NOS inhibition on contraction-stimulated glucose uptake have yielded contradictory results (7-12) but the current study has clearly shown that NO is required for a portion of glucose uptake during contractions (Fig 4). This is the first study in rats where NOS inhibition has been administered during the contractions and at the same time that glucose uptake was being determined. Most rat studies have either contracted isolated muscles during NOS inhibition or contracted muscles in situ with no NOS inhibition and then glucose uptake was measured 20-70 min after the contractions ceased (with NOS inhibitors present) (see Table 1 of (13)). Therefore these studies actually have little relevance to the regulation of glucose uptake during exercise and are more related to the possible role of NO in the higher glucose disposal observed following exercise compared with rest. The protocol that we employed during the current study closely replicated our previous human exercise studies where we obtained similar findings to the current study (3; 4). A study demonstrated that ingestion of L-NAME in the drinking water for 3 days prior to exercise had no effect on glucose uptake during exercise in mice (11). However, L-NAME crosses the blood brain barrier and affects blood pressure and sympathetic outflow so a model based on that approach needs to be considered with caution.

The magnitude of increase in NOS activity that we observed during contractions (Fig 6A), although relatively

modest, was identical to that observed previously following treadmill running in rats (23). The NOS activity and NO<sub>x</sub> (Fig 6B) results indicate that the L-NAME infusion completely prevented the activation of skeletal muscle NOS during contractions. Since NOS inhibition attenuated the increase in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during contractions by ~35% this indicates that factors in addition to NO also play a role in contraction-stimulated glucose uptake.

Over the past few years there has been enormous interest in AMPK as a potential regulator of contraction-stimulated glucose uptake (24-26). Recently there has been evidence that NOS may lie both upstream and downstream of AMPK. Peroxynitrite, which is formed when NO combines with superoxide, activates AMPK in endothelial cells (27). In addition, high levels of the nitric oxide donor sodium nitroprusside activate AMPK  $\alpha$ 1 in rat skeletal muscle (9). However, in the present study AMPK activation during contractions, as indicated by AMPK $\alpha$  Thr172 phosphorylation (28; 29) and ACC $\beta$  phosphorylation, was unaffected by L-NAME infusion (Fig 5). This indicates that NO was not acting upstream of AMPK. Since AMPK activation was normal during exercise with L-NAME, and a substantial portion of contraction-stimulated glucose uptake was intact during NOS inhibition, it is possible that AMPK activation may have contributed to a portion of the increase in glucose uptake during contraction. Although there is some support for a role of AMPK in contraction-stimulated glucose uptake (24; 30-32) we (33) and others (34-36) have demonstrated dissociations between AMPK activation and contraction-

stimulated glucose uptake so further research is required to clarify this.

AMPK phosphorylates nNOS $\mu$  in skeletal muscle during exercise in humans (21; 25). In the current study the increase in skeletal muscle nNOS $\mu$  phosphorylation during contractions was unaffected by L-NAME (Fig 6C). This is not surprising since AMPK activation during contractions was unaffected by L-NAME (Fig 5). We have found that AMPK phosphorylation of nNOS $\mu$  at Ser1412 has little effect on nNOS $\mu$  activity (Lee-Young, Wadley, Chen, Kemp and McConell et al. unpublished observations). However, the question then is how is it that L-NAME prevented the increase in NOS activity with contractions if it did not effect nNOS $\mu$  phosphorylation at Ser1412. Since L-NAME is a competitive inhibitor it would have been diluted and lost during the extraction and purification steps employed for the NOS activity assay. Therefore there must have been alterations in phosphorylation of sites other than Ser1412 and/or other covalent events with L-NAME infusion during contraction. Since rodent muscle expresses both nNOS $\mu$  and eNOS (37), and AMPK phosphorylates and activates eNOS (20), we also examined eNOS phosphorylation. However, we were unable to detect any eNOS phosphorylation either at rest or following contractions. This likely reflects that nNOS $\mu$  plays a more important role in exercise metabolism than eNOS since downstream NOS signalling (i.e. increased cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP) levels) occurs during contractions in normal muscle and eNOS<sup>-/-</sup> muscle, but not in nNOS $\mu$ <sup>-/-</sup> muscle (37). It is also possible that L-NAME affected other covalent events on nNOS $\mu$ . Irrespective of the mechanism,

this study has shown that NOS inhibition reduces NOS activity during contractions and attenuates increases in skeletal muscle glucose uptake which is an important finding.

The current study clearly showed that in situ contractions increase both total blood flow (Fig 2) and capillary recruitment (Fig 3). The general finding that exercise invokes a marked increase in capillary recruitment (at least 3-fold, Fig. 3a) adds support to the view that muscle at rest is only partly perfused (38; 39), and detracts from the opposite view of full perfusion at rest (e.g. (40)). Both of the methods that have been developed to specifically assess the extent of muscle capillary perfusion, 1-MX metabolism and contrast-enhanced ultrasound, have shown that exercise and insulin each increase capillary recruitment (14) (Fig 3). Thus, these findings imply that there is a capillary reserve at rest and that the unperfused capillaries are likely to be those recruited when contractions commence or insulin is infused. By increasing available capillary surface area delivery of insulin and glucose as well as other nutrients is increased. The initial vascular response for both insulin and exercise is capillary recruitment and changes in total muscle blood flow are secondary and independent to the capillary recruitment (41; 42).

Infusion of L-NAME during contractions caused a modest but significant reduction in total blood flow (femoral blood flow, Fig 2) but the contrast enhanced ultrasound results indicate that there was no alteration to the microcirculation perfusion (Fig 3). The finding that contraction-mediated capillary recruitment was not blocked by L-NAME contrasts with insulin-mediated capillary recruitment which is blocked by L-NAME

(41; 43). For insulin, the increase in capillary perfusion or capillary recruitment plays a crucial role in mediating muscle glucose uptake *in vivo*. For example, in a number of previous studies it has been shown that blockade of the increase in capillary recruitment due to insulin action, was always accompanied by a 50% inhibition of glucose uptake (see review: 44). Importantly, insulin-mediated glucose uptake correlates with the degree of capillary recruitment and not total blood flow (45). Thus the decrease in flow during contraction with L-NAME is unlikely to be the cause of the decreased glucose uptake, especially as the extraction of glucose across the leg was only 15% (data not shown) indicating the delivery of glucose was not limited by the total flow. Additionally the CEU data (Fig. 3) indicated that L-NAME treatment did not reduce the microvascular filling rate, thus the reduction in total flow has occurred in the rapid flow non-nutritive route and not in the nutritive flow routes (6). What is clear is that the two stimuli, exercise and insulin use quite different mechanisms. For example in the obese Zucker rat, insulin-mediated capillary recruitment is totally impaired but exercise-mediated capillary recruitment appears essentially normal as does the increase in muscle glucose uptake in response to exercise (46; 47).

A novel component incorporated in this rodent study was the use of locally infused (via the epigastric artery of the contracting leg (15)) NOS inhibitor thus avoiding problems associated with systemic

infusion. Previous studies by others have shown that systemic NOS inhibitors cause a marked rise in blood pressure which in turn triggers compensatory responses (48). In addition, systemic infusion is likely to increase entry into the brain where ICV administered NOS inhibitor has been shown to induce a state of insulin resistance (49). A second distinct advantage of locally infused NOS inhibitor was that the contra-lateral leg could be used as control. Any spill-over would be detected by a rise in blood pressure or increase in vascular resistance of the control leg. In so far that this did not occur, we concluded that the effects were limited to the test leg.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that local L-NAME infusion prevents contraction-induced increases in skeletal muscle NOS activity and NO<sub>x</sub> content and attenuates the increase in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during contractions without influencing skeletal muscle capillary recruitment. These effects were independent of skeletal muscle AMPK activation during contraction. These results suggest that nitric oxide is critical for part of the normal increase in skeletal muscle glucose uptake during contraction.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This work was supported by grants from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) of Australia (G.K.M., S.R. and M.G.C.) and Diabetes Australia (G.K.M). S.R. is a Career Fellow of the Heart Foundation of Australia.

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## FIGURE LEGENDS.

**Figure 1.** Experimental protocol. Measurement of capillary recruitment by contrast enhanced ultrasound/microbubbles [pulsing interval (PI) curve] was conducted immediately before electrical stimulation, immediately before L-NAME and at  $t = 30$  min; these required microbubble (MB) infusion over the periods indicated. Electrical stimulation (0.1 ms impulse at 2 Hz and 35 volts) was commenced at  $t = 0$  min. Local infusion of L-NAME was commenced at  $t = 10$  min via the epigastric artery of the stimulated (test) leg to achieve  $5 \mu\text{M}$ . A bolus of radioactive 2-deoxyglucose was injected at  $t = 20$  min and muscle were removed at  $t = 30$  min. Local infusion of L-NAME is via the epigastric artery; # indicates a continuous withdrawal ( $50 \mu\text{l}\cdot\text{min}^{-1}$ ) from the carotid artery. The calf muscle was freeze clamped at 30 min.

**Figure 2.** Effect of local L-NAME (filled symbols) or saline (open symbols) on absolute femoral blood flow (A) and change in femoral blood flow from 10 min (the start of the L-NAME infusion) (B) in the contracted test leg (circles) and contra-lateral control leg (squares). Format *a* of the protocol of Fig. 1 (see text) was used. Flow probes were positioned around the femoral arteries of each leg. Values are means  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 11$ ).

\* Significantly different to contraction alone and values for the contra-lateral leg.

**Figure 3.** Effect of L-NAME (solid bars) or saline (open bars) on capillary volume and capillary flow rate in the contracted test leg. Capillary volume and flow rate were measured by contrast enhanced ultrasound using phospholipid microbubbles before commencement of contraction (Basal); after 10 min of contraction and before L-NAME infusion (Contraction); and at the end of the protocol during L-NAME infusion (Contraction+L-NAME). Values are means  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 8$ ). Also shown is a typical pulsing interval curve.

**Figure 4.** Effect of L-NAME on 2-deoxyglucose uptake ( $R'g$ ) in the contracted test leg (contraction) and contra-lateral control leg (rest). \*Significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ; 2-way ANOVA) from control (rest) leg, #Significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ; 2-way ANOVA) from -LNAME.  $R'g$  was measured over the final 10 min and the results are expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 6$ ).

**Figure 5.** Effect of L-NAME on Thr<sup>172</sup> phosphorylation of AMPK $\alpha$  (A) and Ser<sup>222</sup> of ACC $\beta$  (B) in the contracted test leg and contra-lateral control leg. Values are means  $\pm$  SEM. † main effect ( $P < 0.05$ ; 2-way ANOVA) for contraction.

**Figure 6.** Effect of L-NAME on muscle NOS activity (A), NO<sub>x</sub> (B) and Ser<sup>1446</sup> phosphorylation of nNOS (C) in the contracted test leg and contra-lateral control leg. Values are means  $\pm$  SEM. \*Significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ; 2-way ANOVA) from control leg, † main effect ( $P < 0.05$ ; 2-way ANOVA) for contraction.

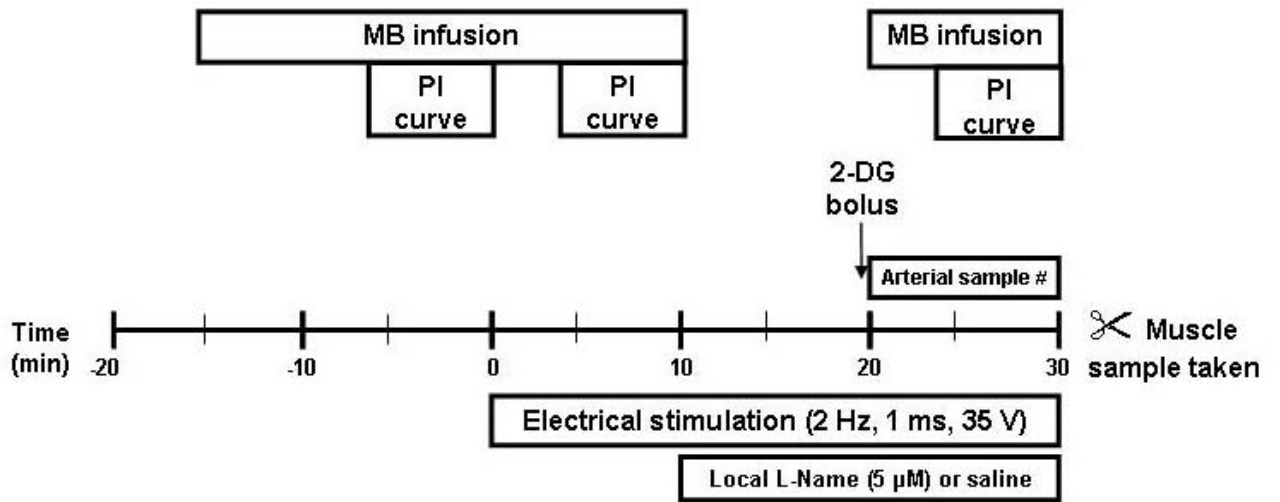


Figure 1

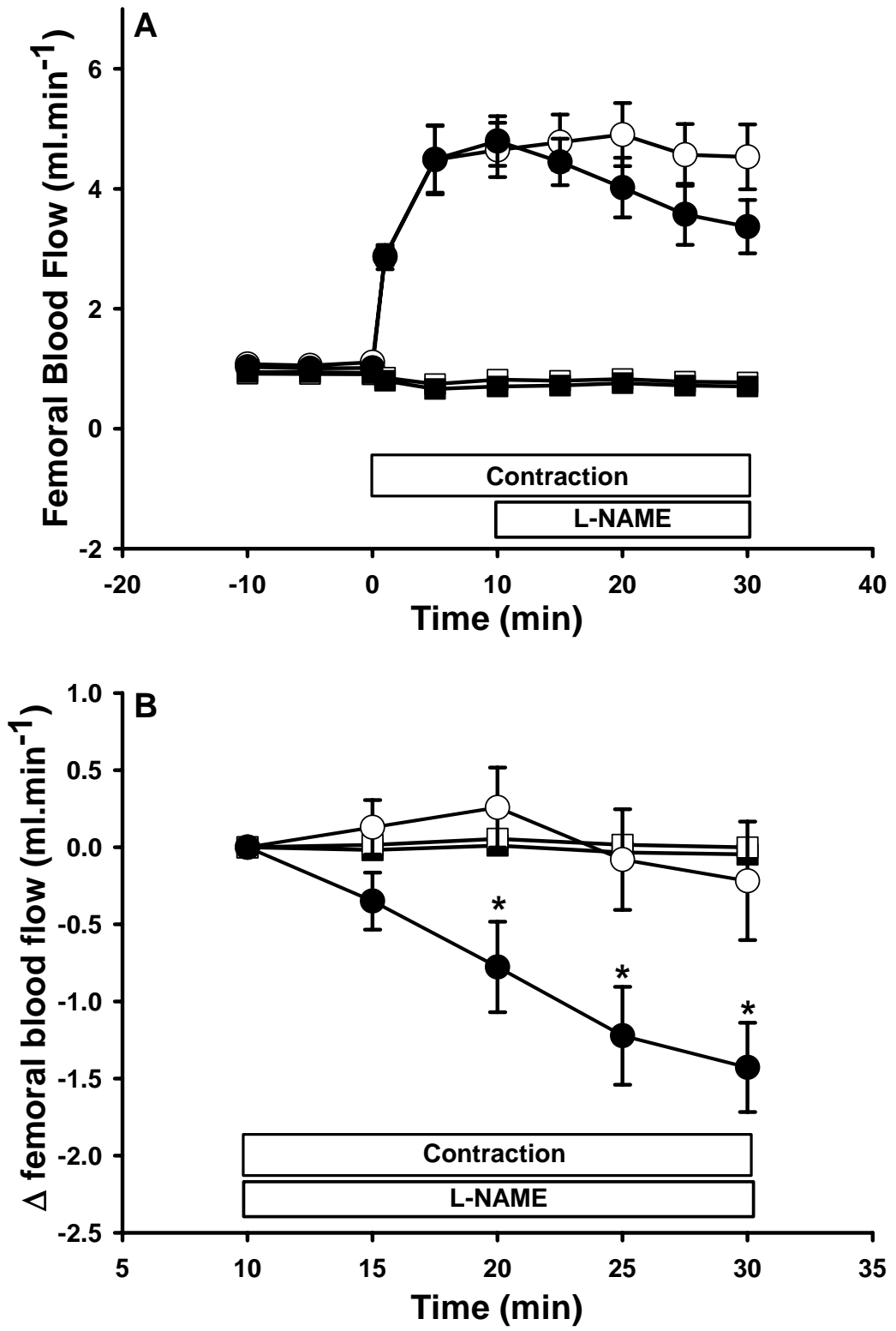


Figure 2

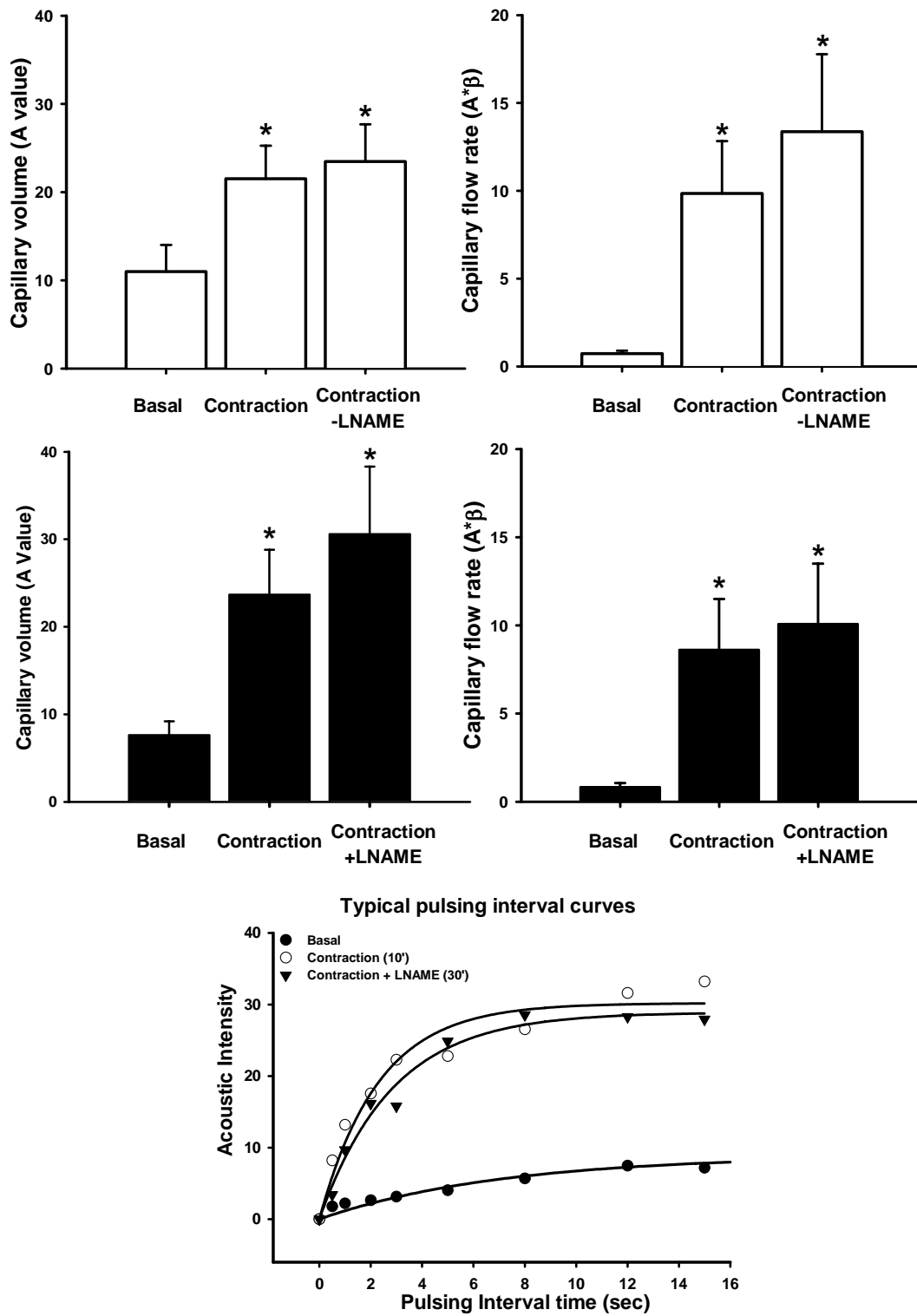


Figure 3

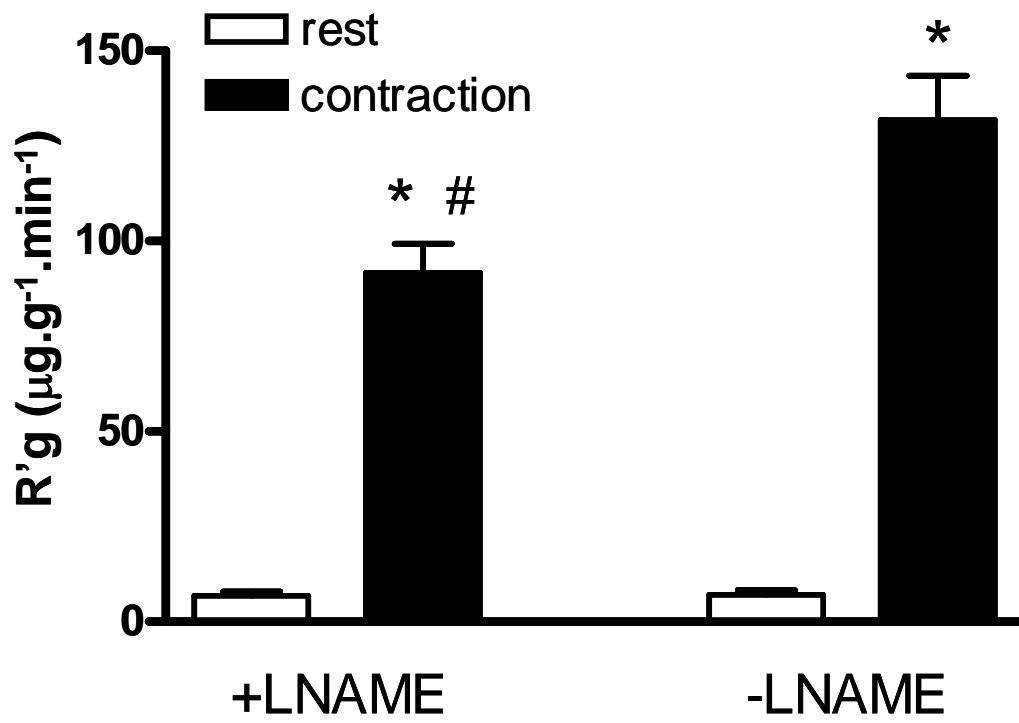
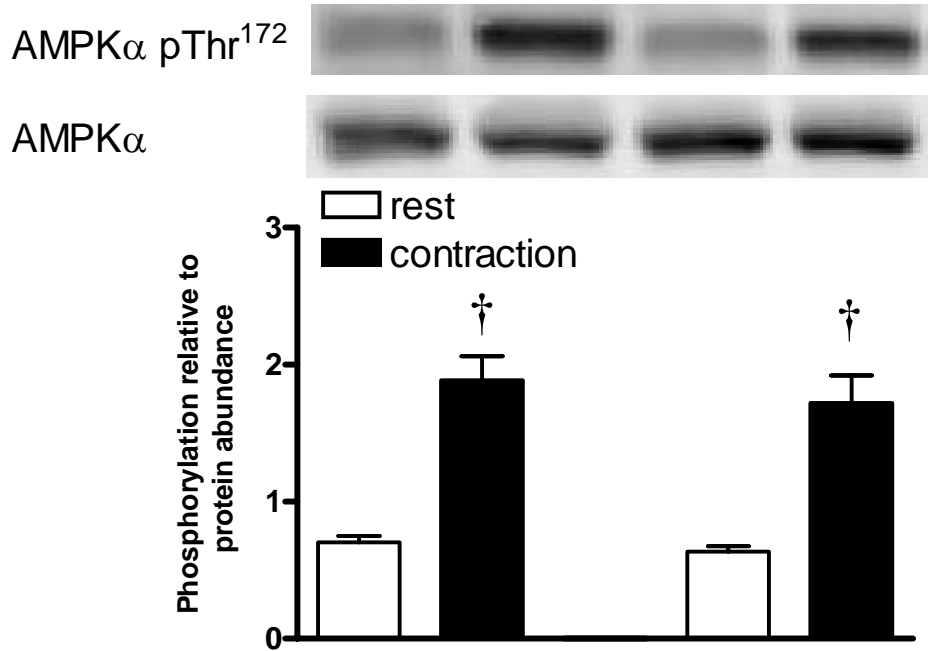


Figure 4

### A: AMPK $\alpha$ phosphorylation



### B: ACC $\beta$ phosphorylation

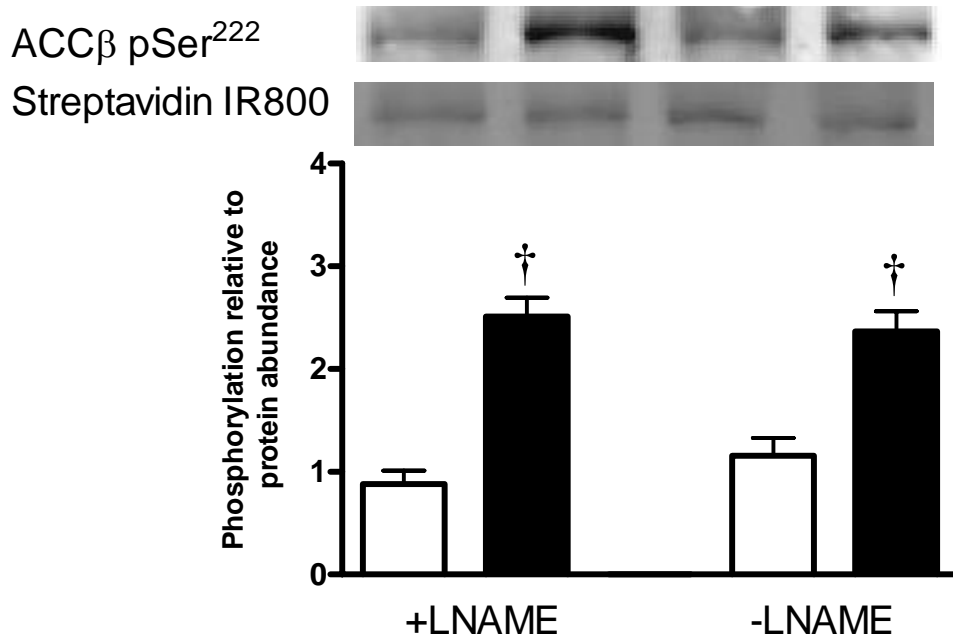
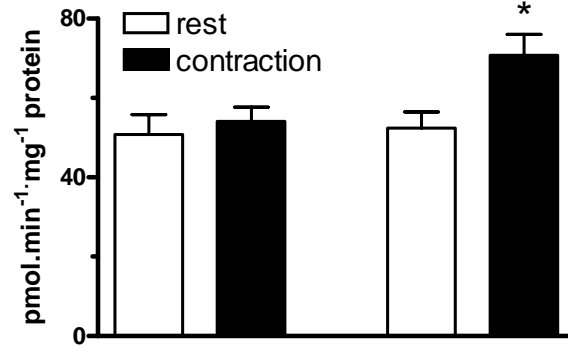
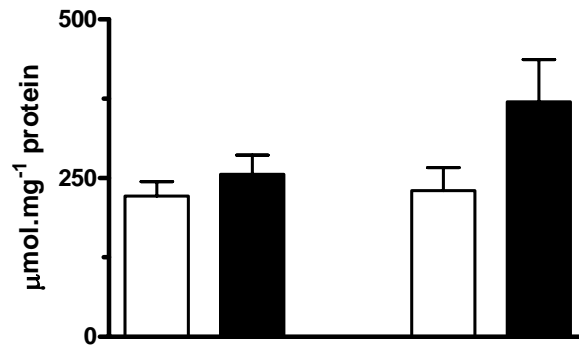


Figure 5

A: NOS activity



B: NOx levels



C: nNOS phosphorylation

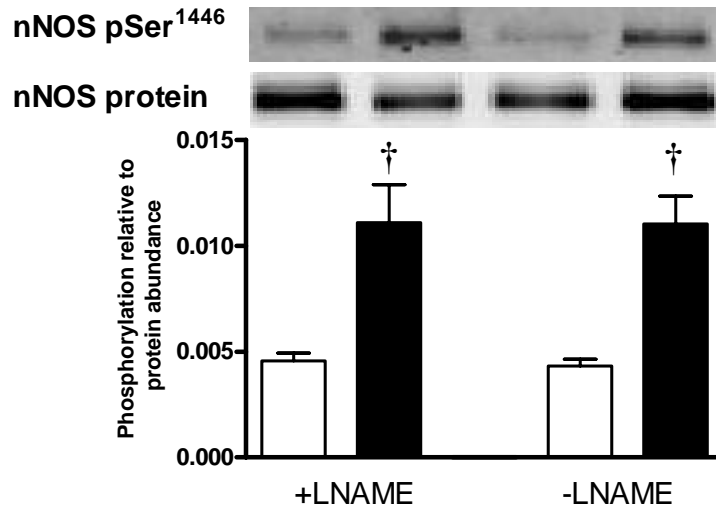


Figure 6