Chapter 3

The between and within day variation in gross efficiency


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The original publication is available at:

http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs00421-010-1497-4
Abstract

Before the influence of divergent factors on gross efficiency (GE) (the ratio of mechanical power output (PO) to metabolic power input (PI)) can be assessed, the variation in GE between days, i.e. the test-retest reliability, and the within day variation needs to be known. Physically active males (n = 18) performed a maximal incremental exercise test to obtain the maximal oxygen uptake (\( \dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \)) and PO at \( \dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \) (\( P\dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \)), and three experimental testing days, consisting of seven submaximal exercise bouts evenly distributed over the 24 h of the day. Each submaximal exercise bout consisted of 6 min cycling at 45% \( P\dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \), 55% \( P\dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \), and 65% \( P\dot{V}O_{2\text{max}} \), during which oxygen uptake (\( \dot{V}O_2 \)) and the respiratory exchange ratio (RER) were measured. GE was determined from the final three minutes of each exercise intensity with:

\[
GE = \frac{PO}{PI} \cdot 100
\]

PI was calculated by multiplying \( \dot{V}O_2 \) with the oxygen equivalent. GE measured during the individually highest exercise intensity with RER \( \leq 1.0 \) did not differ significantly between days (\( F = 2.70, \ p = 0.08 \)), which resulted in lower and upper boundaries of the 95% limits of agreement of 18.6% and 21.8%, respectively, around a mean GE of 20.2%. Although there were minor within day variations in GE, differences in GE over the day were not significant (\( F = 0.16, \ p = 0.99 \)). The measurement of GE during cycling at intensities approximating the ventilatory threshold is apparently very robust; a change in GE of \( \approx 0.8\% \) can be reliably detected. Lastly, GE does not display a circadian rhythm so long as the criteria of a steady state \( \dot{V}O_2 \) and RER \( \leq 1.0 \) are applied.
Introduction

Gross efficiency (GE) (the ratio of mechanical power output (PO) to metabolic power input (PI))\(^1\) is an important factor in performance\(^2,3\) and in the use of energy flow models.\(^4,5\) Hettinga et al.\(^6\) showed that a change in GE of only 0.9% could result in a 25.6 s difference in time over a 20 km cycling time trial. Additionally, differences in GE (or its equivalent, running economy) have been shown to account for differences in cycling\(^7\) and running\(^8,9\) performance, particularly in athletes matched for high maximal oxygen uptake (\(\dot{VO}_2\max\)). However, for the proper use of energy flow models and for the interpretation of research findings it is important to have good insight into the magnitude and variation in GE.

Different studies have shown that there are differences in GE between subjects, which could be due to differences in technique or skill\(^10–13\) and/or to genetics\(^14–16\) of the subjects. Most studies performed on efficiency are cross-sectional in nature and longitudinal studies are needed to study the causal relationship between, for example training and GE. Prior to conducting a longitudinal study it is essential to have good insight into the reliability of measuring GE. Moseley and Jeukendrup\(^11\) determined economy (EC), delta efficiency (DE), and GE on three different occasions, separated by at least 5 days. The within subjects coefficient of variation (CV) was 3.3%, 6.7%, and 4.2% for EC, DE, and GE, respectively. Thus, when measuring efficiency on multiple days a smaller variation in GE is expected than in DE. The mean CV was 3.2% for GE, which implies that a change in GE as small as 0.6% (e.g. 20.0% to 20.6%) can be perceived.\(^11\) However, there are some limitations to the study of Moseley and Jeukendrup.\(^11\) The first limitation is that Moseley and Jeukendrup\(^11\) averaged the oxygen uptake (\(\dot{VO}_2\)) and respiratory exchange ratio (RER) data over the second and third minute of each 3 min exercise step to determine GE. From previous research it is known that \(\dot{VO}_2\) needs ~3 min to reach a steady state and it is therefore not ideal to average \(\dot{VO}_2\) and RER data over the second and third minute because, \(\dot{VO}_2\) may not be in steady state.\(^17,18\) The second point of discussion is that Moseley and Jeukendrup\(^11\) calculated GE as the mean of all breath-by-breath data collected in the last 2 min of each exercise intensity step, during which RER did not exceed 1.0. It is well known that GE increases in a curvilinear fashion with an increase in exercise intensity (see Chapter 2),\(^19,20\) so the most accurate way to determine GE is to calculate GE from the breath-by-breath data collected at the highest exercise intensity with a RER \(\leq 1.0\). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the reliability of GE using some improvements in the research design of Moseley and Jeukendrup.\(^11\)
Besides the variation in GE between days the within day variation in GE also needs to be considered. Circadian (or diurnal) rhythms in resting heart rate (HR), oral temperature, mesenteric temperature, rectal temperature, blood pressure, and circulating hormones have been extensively investigated. Body temperature (rectal temperature) shows a circadian rhythm in rest, with a mean amplitude of 0.44 °C and a mean acrophase at 17:16 h, which persisted at light, moderate and heavy exercise. However, there are conflicting results about the circadian effect on aerobic exercise capacity. Hill et al. and Giacomoni et al. found significant differences in submaximal steady state VO₂ between exercise performed in the morning and in the evening. The aerobic system responded faster and reached a greater VO₂ amplitude in the evening. This time of day effect on the cardiovascular and respiratory response to exercise can be partly attributed to the circadian rhythm in body temperature. Subjects performed incremental exercise tests at 08:00 h, 12:00 h, 16:00 h, and 20:00 h randomized over different days, with at least 48 h between consecutive tests in the study of Deschenes et al. They found no significant effect of time of day on either pre-exercise or exercise VO₂. These inconclusive results could be due to the chosen time points at which the exercise tests were conducted. In order to determine the circadian rhythms in VO₂ and other exercise related variables ideally, exercise bouts should be evenly distributed over 24 h. If a circadian rhythm in submaximal VO₂ is present, as reported by Hill et al. and Giacomoni et al., it would be expected that GE will also vary with time of day. Brisswalter et al. investigated the effect of time of day on net efficiency (NE) and GE. Subjects performed four submaximal exercise bouts, two in the morning (between 07:00 and 08:30 h) and two in the evening (between 19:00 and 20:30 h), at 80% of the PO associated with the ventilatory threshold (80%POVT). Exercise bouts were separated by at least 24 h. No significant time of day effect was found in VO₂, VCO₂, or RER at rest or during light cycling exercise (45 W). Nevertheless, when exercise intensity increased to 80% POVT there was a significantly higher VO₂ amplitude and a larger VO₂ time constant (slower response) in the morning compared to the evening, resulting in a significantly higher NE in the evening (17.3% vs. 20.5%). The difference in GE, 15.1% (morning) vs. 17.1% (evening), did not reach statistical significance. The main shortcoming of the study of Brisswalter et al. is that they did not use the minimum of six exercise bouts evenly distributed over 24 h of the day, which is viewed as a critical issue by Nelson et al. A study that did use six exercise bouts evenly distributed over 24 h was performed by Reilly and Brooks, who found a significant circadian rhythm at rest in rectal temperature, HR, VO₂, VCO₂ and ventilation (VE). However, during submaximal exercise no circadian rhythm in VO₂, VCO₂, VE, NE, and GE was found. The limitation of the study of Reilly
and Brooks\textsuperscript{26} is that NE and GE were determined during exercise at 82 W and 147 W, which are relatively low absolute workloads, corresponding to relative workloads of 37\% $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$ and 56\% $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$. To accurately investigate a possible circadian rhythm in efficiency each subject should exercise at the same relative intensity and multiple exercise intensities should be chosen, in order to be sure that the highest efficiency is reached.\textsuperscript{19} Because previous research showed that muscle temperature affected efficiency during in vitro measurements\textsuperscript{30} and during cycling exercise\textsuperscript{31,32} it could be expected that the circadian rhythm in body temperature affects GE during cycling exercise.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the variation in GE between and within days by measuring GE at six time points equally distributed over the 24 h of the day. When the variation in GE within and between days is known it will be easier to interpret the findings of other studies and to accurately use energy flow models.

Methods

Subjects

Eighteen healthy, physically active, males participated in this study. Subjects were characterized by a mean height of 183 ± 6 cm, a mean body mass of 74 ± 6 kg, a mean $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$ of 61.3 ± 9.3 ml·kg\textsuperscript{-1}·min\textsuperscript{-1}, and a mean PO at $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$ ($\text{PVO}_{2\text{max}}$) of 378 ± 54 W. Subjects gave written informed consent. In addition, subjects completed a health history form in order to make sure that they were physically healthy and completed the Horne and Ostberg’s morningness-eveningness self-assessment questionnaire\textsuperscript{33} to evaluate their chronotypes. Eleven of the total of eighteen subjects were classified as neither type, four subjects were classified as moderately morning chronotypes and three subjects were moderately evening chronotypes. The experimental protocol for the study was approved by the local ethics committee.

The subjects refrained from strenuous exercise the day before the testing sessions and followed their normal sleep/wake cycle. Alcohol was not consumed within 24 h prior to the tests and caffeine containing beverages were not consumed within 3 h preceding the beginning of the testing sessions. Neither substance was consumed during the experimental days. All subjects ate their last meal at least three hours before the start of the testing session.

Experimental design

All subjects performed a maximal incremental exercise test at least 36 h before the first of the three experimental testing days. Each experimental testing day consisted of seven
submaximal exercise tests distributed at equidistant time intervals over 24 h. The first and
last submaximal exercise test was conducted at the same time of day, separated by 24 h, to
assess the effect of a previous day of physical activity. Subjects performed the 24 h testing
days in groups of six subjects. The first two subjects completed their first submaximal
exercise test at 10:00 h and the following tests at 14:00 h, 18:00 h, 22:00 h, 02:00 h, 06:00
h, 10:00 h. The second pair completed their first submaximal exercise test at 10.30 h
(14:30 h, 18:30 h, 22:30 h, 02:30 h, 06:30 h, 10:30 h), and the third pair executed their
first submaximal exercise test at 11:00 h (15:00 h, 19:00 h, 23:00 h, 03:00 h, 07:00 h,
11:00 h). During the 24 h testing days the subjects resided in the laboratory, in order to
standardize the experimental conditions. Three hours before the first and second
submaximal exercise tests subjects consumed a meal, immediately after the third test
subjects consumed their dinner, and after the fourth submaximal exercise test subjects
were asked to sleep. Fifteen min before the submaximal exercise test at, respectively,
02:00 h, 02:30 h, and 03:00 h and at respectively 06:00 h, 06:30 h, and 07:00 h the
subjects woke up, dressed and prepared themselves for the test. After the test in the early
morning (06:00 h, 06:30 h, 07:00 h, respectively) subjects consumed their breakfast. After
the last submaximal test of each experimental testing day subjects completed the Leeds
Sleep Evaluation Questionnaire (LSEQ) in order to get an idea of the effort it took to get
to sleep, to wake up, their quality of sleep, and their overall feeling after waking up.34

Exercise was performed on an electronically braked cycle ergometer (Excalibur
Sport, Lode Medical Technology, Groningen, The Netherlands) at a pedaling frequency of
80 revolutions per minute (rpm),35,36 which was continually displayed on a screen in front
of the cyclists. Saddle and handlebar position set to individual preferences were kept the
same during all tests. Subjects used their own clipless pedals or toe clips.

Expired air was analyzed breath-by-breath using open circuit spirometry (Cosmed
Quark b², Cosmed S. R. L., Rome, Italy). Before the start of each exercise test the gas
analyzer was calibrated with room air, and a reference gas mixture (16% O₂ and 5% CO₂)
and the volume transducer was calibrated using a 3L syringe (Cosmed S. R. L., Rome,
Italy). HR was measured using radiotelemetry (Polar Electro OY, Kempele, Finland).
Before the start and immediately after the exercise test body temperature was measured
with a telemetric gastrointestinal temperature pill (CorTemp, HQInc, Palmetto, FL, USA),
because many exercise related variables are closely related to the circadian rhythm in body
temperature.24

Room temperature (17.4 ± 2.0ºC) and relative humidity (54.5 ± 8.1%) were
standardized in order to keep the environmental conditions relatively the same during all
testing sessions.
**Maximal incremental exercise test**

The maximal incremental exercise test started with a warm-up of 2 min at a PO of 100 W. Immediately after the warm-up the maximal incremental exercise test began at a PO of 100 W which increased every minute by 25 W. During the test subjects had to maintain a pedal frequency of 80 rpm. The test ended when the pedaling frequency dropped below the 70 rpm. The maximal incremental exercise test was not conducted at a specific time of the day, because previous research has shown that there is no circadian rhythm in $\dot{V}O_2^{max}$. 

**Experimental testing days**

Three hours prior to the start of the first experimental testing day subjects ate their breakfast and ingested the temperature pill. The subjects arrived one hour prior to the start of the first exercise test at the laboratory to make sure they were in relative rest.

Resting metabolism was measured during the first 6 min of the submaximal exercise test, while subjects were sitting on the bicycle ergometer. After 6 min of rest, exercise intensity was set at 45% of $P\dot{V}O_2^{max}$ and the subjects cycled 6 min at this relatively low exercise intensity, after which the exercise intensity increased to 55% $P\dot{V}O_2^{max}$ for another 6 min. During the third and last exercise step, the workload increased to 65% $P\dot{V}O_2^{max}$, which was maintained for the remaining 6 min. Just as during the incremental exercise test, pedal frequency was maintained at 80 rpm. During the last 30 s of each submaximal exercise step subjects rated their perceived exertion (RPE). $\dot{V}O_2$, RER, HR, and body temperature were measured as previously described.

GE was determined during the 3:00 - 6:00 interval of each 6 min submaximal exercise step. GE was calculated using Equation 3.1:

$$GE = \frac{PO}{PT} \cdot 100$$  

Equation 3.1

In which PI is the metabolic PI, which can be calculated by multiplying $\dot{V}O_2$ (L·s⁻¹) with the oxygen equivalent (Equation 3.2), as suggested by Garby and Astrup.

$$PI = \dot{V}O_2 \cdot (4940 \cdot RER + 16040)$$  

Equation 3.2

For the determination of GE $\dot{V}O_2$ had to be in steady state and RER $\leq 1.0$, to avoid the contribution of unmeasured anaerobic work.
Statistics

Data are presented as individual values or means ± standard deviations (SD). A repeated measures ANOVA (SPSS 14.0, SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used to determine the variation in VO₂, GE, RPE, and body temperature between days. If significant main effects were found Bonferroni adjustments were used to locate the differences. To assess the variation in GE between tests the 95% limits of agreement and the CV were calculated. The individual CV was calculated by expressing the SD as a percentage of the mean and the overall CV was obtained by taking the square root of the mean of the squared CVs.

The within day variation in VO₂, GE, RPE, and body temperature was first analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA. If there was a significant difference in the above mentioned variables within a day a least square cosinor regression analysis was performed to determine the best fit cosine function, i.e. \( Y(t) = M + A \cdot \cos(\omega \cdot t + \phi) \) where \( t \) is the time of day, \( M \) is the mesor (mean value), \( A \) is the amplitude (half the variation from peak to trough values), \( \phi \) the acrophase (time of peak), and \( \omega \) the angular speed (in the current study the angular frequency is one cycle per day). A repeated measures ANOVA, with the factor day, was conducted to find out if \( A \) was significantly different from zero and to compare the acrophases of the cosine functions of different parameters. The scores on the LSEQ were compared to 50, which is the score that corresponds to a normal night sleep, with a repeated measures ANOVA with the factor day. To test the effect of a previous day of physical activity, the difference in VO₂, GE, and RPE between the first and last submaximal exercise test of an experimental testing day were evaluated using repeated measures ANOVA. Differences were considered to be significant if \( p < 0.05 \).

Results

All subjects completed the three experimental testing days. One exercise intensity was selected for GE analysis, based on the mean RER during the final three min of the submaximal exercise steps. The highest exercise intensity for each individual with a mean RER \( \leq 1 \), during the final three minutes, was chosen for the GE analysis. In this way, the highest possible GE was selected for every individual, because GE increases when exercise intensity rises, as can be seen in Figure 3.1. The data of one of the subjects was excluded, because his mean RER during the final three min of the first submaximal exercise step (45% PV₀₂max) already exceeded 1.0, which makes it impossible to calculate GE.
Figure 3.1 The increase in gross efficiency (GE) with exercise intensity (% $\dot{V}O_2_{\text{max}}$). Each data point represents the mean GE of three days for each individual. Data points were only displayed when RER did not exceed 1.0. Cross marks represent the overall mean GE. The highest intensity with valid data was selected for each subject.

No significant difference in respiratory data was shown between the first and the last submaximal exercise test of the experimental testing days ($\dot{V}O_2$: $F = 0.49$, $p = 0.90$; GE: $F = 0.02$, $p = 0.90$). There was a significant difference in RPE between the first and the last test of the experimental testing days ($F = 8.74$, $p < 0.05$). However, a significant interaction between days and time of the day (10:00 h) was also found ($F = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Post hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment ($\alpha = 0.017$) showed that there was no significant difference between the first and the last test on day 1 ($F = 0.13$, $p = 0.72$), but that there was a significant difference for day 2 ($F = 1.44$, $p < 0.01$) and day 3 ($F = 9.66$, $p < 0.01$).

Repeated measures ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference in $\dot{V}O_2$, at the highest intensity with RER $\leq 1.0$, between days ($F = 1.28$, $p = 0.29$) and between different times of the day ($F = 0.62$, $p = 0.72$). The variation in $\dot{V}O_2$ is displayed in Figure 3.2A.
Figure 3.2 The within day variation in VO$_2$ (A), RPE (B), and GE (C) averaged over all subjects. The open circles represent the variation in VO$_2$, RPE, and GE within day 1, 2, and 3. The filled circles represent the average of all three days.
GE did not differ significantly between days \((F = 2.70, p = 0.08)\) or between different times of the day \((F = 0.16, p = 0.99; \text{Figure 3.2C})\), thus there was no least square cosinor regression analysis performed. There were no significant interaction effects. The individual GE data is displayed in Figure 3.3. To assess the variability in GE between tests, i.e. the reliability, the 95% limits of agreement and the within subject CV were determined. At first, heteroscedasticity was examined by calculating the correlation coefficient between the absolute differences and the individual means. Of the 21 correlation coefficients only 1 correlation coefficient was significantly positive, besides which 10 correlation coefficients were negative, from which could be concluded that there was no heteroscedasticity present in the data. The lower boundary of the 95% limits of agreement was 18.6% and the upper boundary was 21.8% for a mean GE of 20.2% ± 1.4%. The total CV was determined from the CVs at the 6 different times of the day with the following formula \(CV = \sqrt{(CV_1^2 + CV_2^2 + \ldots + CV_{n-1}^2 + CV_n^2) / n}\), which resulted in a total CV of 4.4%.

The RPE scores did not change significantly between days \((F = 1.62, p = 0.21)\), however there was a significant time of day effect on RPE \((F = 13.8, p < 0.001)\). A significant interaction effect was found between day and time of day \((F = 2.35, p < 0.05)\). Post hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment \((\alpha = 0.017)\) showed that there was no significant time of day effect for day 1 \((F = 2.21, p = 0.05)\), but that there was a significant time of day effect for day 2 \((F = 8.59, p < 0.001)\) and day 3 \((F = 12.56, p < 0.001)\). However, the least square cosinor regression analyses showed that the amplitudes of the best fit cosinor functions did not differ significantly from zero \((F = 1.00, p = 0.40; \text{Figure 3.2B})\).
Figure 3.3 A-C The individual variation in GE. A-C show the individual variation in GE for subject A (filled circles), B (open circles), and C (filled triangles), D-F, G-I, respectively, within day 1, 2, and 3.
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Figure 3.3 D-F The individual variation in GE. D-F show the individual variation in GE for subject J (filled circles), K (open circles), and L (filled triangles), M-O, and P and Q, respectively, within day 1, 2, and 3.
To investigate if possible circadian rhythms in physiological variables during exercise were due to changes in body temperature, body temperature was measured before and immediately after each exercise bout. It was not possible to perform a repeated measures ANOVA on body temperature data to test if body temperature changed significantly between different times of the day, because of missing values, which were caused by the premature excretion of the temperature pill in several subjects. To test if there existed a circadian rhythm in body temperature a least square cosinor regression analysis was performed. A repeated measures ANOVA was executed to examine if the amplitudes of the best fit cosinor functions differed significantly from zero \(F = 55.4, p < 0.001\). There was no difference in the amplitude of the best fit cosinor function of body temperature before and immediately after exercise \(F = 0.30, p = 0.59\). The mean minimum body temperature was estimated to be 36.54 ± 0.18 °C for day 1 and was reached at 03:42 ± 3:14 h, the minimum body temperature was 36.6 ± 0.21 °C and 36.6 ± 0.19 °C during day 2 and 3 and was reached at 02:46 ± 6:32 h and 03:57 ± 4:31 h, respectively. The maximum body temperatures were estimated to be 37.5 ± 0.30 °C, 37.3 ± 0.25 °C, and 37.3 ± 0.18 °C, reached at 17:07 ± 3:11 h, 17:35 ± 1:45 h, and 17:22 ± 2:13 h, at respectively day 1, day 2, and day 3. Immediately after the exercise bout the maximum body temperatures were 38.2 ± 0.36 °C, 38.2 ± 0.24 °C, and 38.2 ± 0.27 °C, reached at 16:26 ± 3:49 h, 17:38 ± 4:23 h, and 17:12 ± 2:56 h, at respectively day 1, day 2, and day 3.

The scores on the LSEQ for the different days were significantly different from 50 \(F = 6.76, p < 0.01\). The mean scores of the experimental testing days were 45.28 ± 17.46, 44.93 ± 12.25, and 44.05 ± 12.15, for day 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Post hoc analysis with a Bonferroni adjustment \(\alpha = 0.017\) revealed that the LSEQ scores after a night sleep on day 1 did not significantly differ from 50 \(F = 6.86, p = 0.02\). The LSEQ scores of day 2 and day 3 were significantly different from 50 \(F = 19.1, p < 0.001; F = 23.1, p < 0.001\). There was no significant difference between the LSEQ scores on the three experimental testing days \(F = 0.31, p = 0.74\), there was a significant difference between the scores on the ten questions \(F = 7.78, p < 0.001\) and a significant interaction effect between days and questions \(F = 1.66, p < 0.05\). Subjects described falling asleep as more difficult, their quality of sleep as more restless, and they were more tired after waking up than after a normal night sleep.
Table 3.1 Characteristics of the circadian rhythm in body temperature.

<table>
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<th>Subject</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
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<td>0.10</td>
<td>100.7</td>
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<td>0.47</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>99.0</td>
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<td>36.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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Body temperature measured immediately before the start of the exercise test. M, the mesor (mean value); A, the amplitude (half the variation from peak to trough values); φ, the acrophase (time of peak) of the best fit cosine function.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to assess the variation in GE between and within days. The main outcome was that there was no significant difference in GE between days and between different times of the day.

Before the influence of different factors on GE can be studied, the smallest detectable change in GE must be known. Moseley and Jeukendrup investigated the reliability of cycling efficiency during a graded exercise test and found a CV of 4.2% for GE, from which they concluded that a graded exercise test using 35 W increments every 3 min resulted in reliable measures of GE. Moseley and Jeukendrup calculated the within subject CV on the basis of three graded exercise tests. The design of the present study made it possible to determine the reliability of GE at six different times of the day, the
reliability of GE at 10:00 h was based on six measurements and the reliability of GE at the other times of the day was based on three measurements. Even with the limitations of the study of Moseley and Jeukendrup, the total within subject CV of 4.4% for GE found in this study was of the same magnitude as the CV of 4.2% for GE reported in the study of Moseley and Jeukendrup. The mean CV in the present study was 3.9%, which suggests that, for example, an improvement in GE from 20.2% to 21.0% can be reliably detected. However, the use of the CV assumes that heteroscedasticity is present in the data. From the correlation coefficients between absolute differences and individual means could be concluded that there was no heteroscedasticity present in the GE data of this study, which means that the CV is not the best measure to determine absolute reliability and that the 95% limits of agreement is potentially a better measure of reliability. Therefore, The 95% limits of agreement were determined in the present study. With an overall mean GE of 20.2% (± 1.4%) the chance is 95% that a repeated GE measure would be between 18.6% and 21.8%. Therefore, the smallest change in GE than can be detected is for example an increase as small as 0.8% in GE from 20.2% to 21.0% or a decrease from 20.2% to 19.4%, which is in agreement with the results of Moseley and Jeukendrup.

The existence of possible circadian rhythm in GE, induced by changes in body temperature, was studied by determining GE at six time points equally distributed over the 24 h of the day. No significant difference in GE between different times of the day was found, which implies that there is no circadian rhythm in GE. This result supports the results of the study of Brisswalter et al., who found no significant difference in GE between submaximal exercise bouts at 80% POVT in the morning and evening. However, Brisswalter et al. did find a significantly lower VO₂ amplitude and smaller VO₂ time constant in the evening, which resulted in a significantly higher NE in the evening. However, NE is not the most appropriate measure of efficiency as NE uses a baseline subtraction, which implies that resting metabolic rate is independent of exercise intensity and is totally isolated from work production. Ettema and Lorås reviewed the available literature about cycling efficiency and concluded that it is not correct to believe that resting metabolic rate is unaffected by exercise intensity. Therefore, they recommended the use of GE as the most appropriate measure of whole body efficiency. A minimum of six exercise bouts evenly distributed over the 24 h of the day is necessary to study circadian rhythms. Reilly and Brooks used the minimum of six exercise bouts evenly distributed over the day, which led to the finding that during rest rectal temperature, HR, VO₂, VCO₂, and VE possessed a circadian rhythm, but, that the circadian rhythm in VO₂, VCO₂, and VE disappeared when exercise intensity increased to submaximal and maximal workloads. The absence of a circadian rhythm in VO₂, VCO₂, and RER resulted in the
absence of a circadian rhythm in GE, NE, and DE. The results of this study are in agreement with the results of Reilly and Brooks.\textsuperscript{26} We found a circadian rhythm in resting $\dot{V}O_2$. However this circadian rhythm was absent during exercise. The difference between the current study and the study of Reilly and Brooks\textsuperscript{26} is the chosen exercise intensity at which efficiency was determined. Reilly and Brooks\textsuperscript{26} determined GE at absolute workloads of 82 W and 147 W. However, to precisely determine GE each subject should exercise at multiple relative exercise intensities as GE increases with exercise intensity (see Chapter 2).\textsuperscript{19} Another difference is that subjects in the study of Reilly and Brooks\textsuperscript{26} performed the exercise tests on 6 separate days and not on the same day, which potentially creates an extra source of variation. With this source of potential variation excluded by the design of the present study no circadian rhythm in GE was found.

All subjects were physically active and engaged in regular sport activities at least two times per week ($7.25 \pm 5.6$ h/week). Eleven of the subjects were cyclists; they had at least two years of cycling experience and cycled minimally 3,000 km per year. The remaining subjects engaged in divergent sport activities. There was a significant difference in GE between cyclists and non-cyclists ($F = 6.97, p < 0.05$), with the cyclists having a higher mean GE ($20.7\% \pm 0.9\%$; Figure 3.4A) than the non-cyclists ($19.4\% \pm 1.7\%$; Figure 3.4B). There was no significant interaction effect between time of day and cyclist vs. non-cyclist ($F = 1.56, p = 0.17$). Thus even well trained cyclists do not show a circadian rhythm in GE.

One of the shortcomings of the present study is the significant difference between the LSEQ scores of the subjects and 50, the score belonging to a normal night sleep,\textsuperscript{41} for day two and three. However, there were no significant differences in the respiratory data collected during the first submaximal exercise test and during the last submaximal exercise test, both conducted at the same time of day, namely 10:00 h. This suggests that there was no effect of previous physical activity. Besides that, the advantage of the chosen protocol in the current study is the standardization of the experimental conditions, i.e. food intake, the consumption of beverages, and sleep were controlled in the same way during the three experimental testing days. Thus, the influence of confounding factors on GE was minimized during the experimental testing days. Whether because of or in spite of these experimental controls, the data support the concept that GE is a very robust measurement which, if performed according to clearly defined rules, is remarkably robust. Both our data and the data of others (where some experimental controls were not as rigid)\textsuperscript{11} suggest that the within subject variation in GE across multiple measurements and across the time span of the entire day is $\sim 4.4\%$. 
In summary, it can be concluded that GE is a very robust measure. An increase or decrease in GE as small as 0.8% can be reliably detected and circadian rhythms in body temperature and resting \( \dot{V}O_2 \) do not result in a circadian rhythm in GE, determined at an exercise intensity with RER close to 1.00, so long as constraints related to steady state \( \dot{V}O_2 \) and RER are observed.

**Figure 3.4** The variation in gross efficiency (GE) over the day of cyclists (A) and non-cyclists (B). The open circles represent the variation in GE within day 1, 2, and 3. The filled circles represent the average of all three days.
Section 3

References


