

Simple and Two-Element Hill-Type Muscle Models Cannot Replicate Realistic Muscle Stiffness

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INTRODUCTION

An important functional property of muscle is to provide stiffness for the limbs [1]. Joint and limb endpoint stiffnesses are critical to control limb posture, movement and interaction with the environment [1,2]. In general, stiffness produces instantaneous resistance to change in muscle length. Stiffness is known to be modulated muscle length (i.e., by joint angles) and muscle activation levels (i.e. α drive) [3], but the mechanisms that produce them remain unclear.

Hill-type models are a class of normalized lumped-parameter models of muscle of varying complexities that can be scaled to approximate specific muscles. They estimate muscle force as functions of muscle architecture (physiological cross sectional area and pennation angle), kinematic state of muscle (length, and velocity) and the muscle activation level (α drive) [4,5]. The goal of this project is to assess the ability of Hill-type models to produce muscle stiffness [6].

METHODS

In this project, we studied versions of two popular Hill-type muscle models. The first model is a simple linear model consisting of series and parallel springs, a viscous element and a contractile element referred herein as the simple Hill-type model without force-length properties (or the Hill-type w/o fl) [4]. The contractile element converts the α drive to active muscle force. This model, as presented, did not have force-length properties. Thus, we modified it by adding force-length properties to it (i.e., Hill-type w fl). The two-element Hill-type model incorporates two parallel active contractile elements for slow and fast muscle fibers (i.e., Two-Element model) [5]. Note that the active force-length

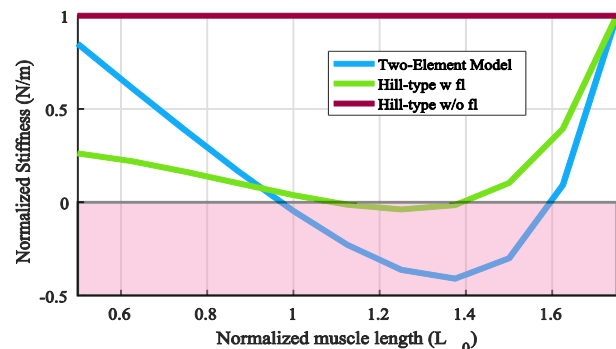


Figure 1: Stiffness as a function of muscle length.

properties of muscle (included in the contractile element) are not equivalent to the Hook's law stress-strain relationship. Rather, they represent the active force the muscle can produce at each length for a given activation level [7].

We estimated muscle stiffness in quasi-static condition by applying ten small displacements (of 2.5% L_0 , where L_0 is the optimal muscle length) with the muscle lengths set between 0.5 L_0 and 1.8 L_0 while the muscle was fully activated. We also calculated values of stiffness at two lengths (0.8 and 1.2 L_0) for α drive ranging between 0 to 100 percent in steps of 1%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows stiffness for all models as a function of normalized muscle length. To make figures easier to compare, all figures are normalized to their maximum absolute value. Stiffness for the simple Hill-type model without force-length properties does not depend on muscle length (red). Stiffness varies as a function of muscle length for the other two models (blue and green). However, it becomes negative at some lengths. It is clear that the negative stiffness is not physically possible since it results in instability. Both of the two-Element and modified Hill-type

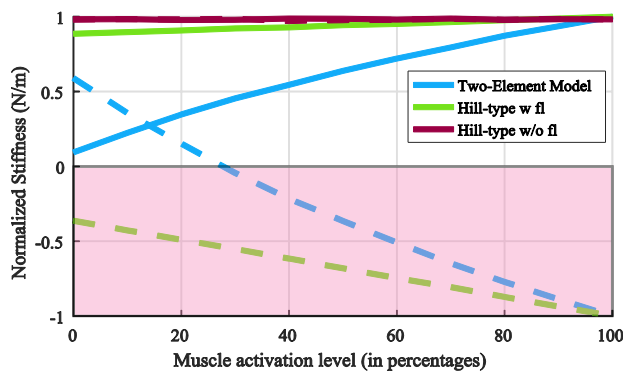


Figure 2: Stiffness as a function of muscle lengths equal to $0.8 L_0$ (solid lines) and $1.2 L_0$ (dashed lines).

models, however, show patterns similar to that reported in experiments in their non-negative regions [8]. Figure 2 shows the stiffness for all models as a function of muscle activation level at two representative muscle lengths ($0.8, 1.2 L_0$). Once again, stiffness is *not* a function of muscle activation in the absence of force-length properties (red). Stiffness for the two-Element model *does* vary with the muscle activation level for the other two models in a length-dependent manner (blue and green). Interestingly, this change in the stiffness was consistent with the relative proportions of the derivatives of the active and passive parts of the force-length curve. i.e. the more the activation, the larger the weight of the active part. This result is expected considering that activation applies only to the active part of the force-length curve of muscle. As can be seen on the figures, the stiffness can be negative for both length dependent models (blue and green) when the muscle length is longer than L_0 , which demonstrates that the models fail to replicate realistic muscle stiffness.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results show the simplest Hill-type model fails to reproduce both muscle length and activation dependence of stiffness. The modified and two-element Hill-type muscle models produced stiffness dependence on muscle length and activation, but invariably produce negative stiffness at some muscle lengths, which is not physically realistic. Although force-length properties are very important in explaining stiffness [1,2], Hill-type models cannot

replicate realistic muscle stiffness even when including presence of force-length properties. Future work will explore if dynamic simulations (as opposed to this quasi-static version) and other extensions, such as the inclusion of force-velocity properties, can produce realistic muscle stiffness. If those efforts are unsuccessful, other models such as population-, fiber- and sarcomere-based—although more computationally complex—would need to be preferred.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was supported by NIH-NIAMS under award numbers R01AR050520 and R01AR052345 grants to FVC. This project is also supported by USC graduate school's provost fellowship to A.