

Acapnia due to decompression / by W.D.M. Paton.

Contributors

Paton, William D. M.

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
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Acapnia due to decompression. By W. D. M. PATON.
National Institute for Medical Research, Hampstead, London, N.W. 3

From accounts of unaided submarine escape, it is clear that it is easier to refrain from inhaling during ascent through water than might be expected. One contributing factor would be the loss of CO_2 from the lungs by venting air during the ascent. For an ascent at rate S , with lung volume V , and surrounding pressure P , the rate of venting is $(V \times S)/P$, and the amount vented in an ascent from depth D to the surface (by integration) is $V \log_e D$. For $V = 5$ l. and $D = 60$ ft., amount vented = 5.2 l. If the subject's minute volume before the ascent was about 5 l./min., there should thus be a lengthening of breath-holding time of about 1 min.

To test this, the subject (W.D.M.P.) determined his breath-holding time (in these conditions, the time during which it was possible to refrain from inspiration) at zero pressure, under pressure and during decompression. A mouthpiece connected to two water valves was used, with which it is easy to avoid unintentional inspiration, yet the lungs can vent freely in decompression. Decompressions took about 2 min. and ended shortly before breaking-point. In the last series, at the breaking-point, alveolar air samples were taken to verify that the end-point was constant.

Results are shown in the following table; O_2 and CO_2 tensions are given in percentage of an atmosphere:

Pressure (ft. of water)	Breath-holding time (sec.)	Remarks
0	68.2, 70.4, 79.3	(Breath-holding time determined after a maximum inspiration in all tests)
30	122.8, 123.1	
60	115.6, 127.1	
Decompression 60 to 10 ft.	223	Breath held 90 sec. before decompression started
Decompression 60 to 10 ft.	182	Breath held 60 sec. before decompression started
0	(a) 59.1 (b) 74.7	(a) — (b) CO_2 7.10%; O_2 11.65%
60	(a) 111.5 (b) 111.5	(a) CO_2 7.81%; O_2 49.3% (b) CO_2 7.75%; O_2 49.6%
Decompression 60 to 11 ft.	178.2 (breath held 60 sec. first)	CO_2 7.94%; O_2 15.01%
Decompression 60 to 10 ft.	205.2 (breath held 90 sec. first)	CO_2 7.98%; O_2 13.2%

These results show that the breath-holding time under pressure is roughly double that at the surface, and that the breath-holding time with interposed decompression is roughly doubled yet again. This further increase thus cannot be due to the increase in oxygen tension while under pressure, and is also shown not to have involved any extension in the physiological breaking-point. It is of interest that a greater advantage is obtained the longer the breath is held before the decompression; the concentration of CO_2 in the air vented and hence the total loss of CO_2 is thereby increased. Taking this effect into account, the increases in breath-holding time due to decompression (60–100 sec.) are of the order expected, if they were due to a partial acapnia resulting from loss of CO_2 in the air vented from the lungs during decompression.

Asphyxia due to decompression
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From accounts of unexplained deaths, it is clear that it is easier to
 retain from labelling than essential elements which might be expected.
 the retentive factor would be the loss of O_2 from the lungs by venting
 during the ascent. For an ascent at rate V with lung volume V_L and
 pressure P , the rate of venting is $(V/V_L)P$, and the amount vented in an
 ascent from depth D to the surface (by integration) is $V/V_L \int_D^0 P dD$, and
 is $0.033 V/V_L$ amount vented. If the subject's minute volume during the
 ascent was about 5 l./min., there should have been a percentage of breath-
 holding time of about 1 min.

To test this the subject (W.P.M.P.) determined his breath-holding time
 in these conditions. The time during which it was possible to retain from
 inspiration at zero pressure under pressure and during decompression
 at 1 atmosphere connected to two water valves was noted, with which it is easy
 to avoid unintentional inspiration, and the lungs can vent freely in decom-
 pression. Decompression took about 2 min. and immediately before breathing
 point. In the last series at the breaking point, alveolar air samples were taken
 to verify that the end-point was accurate.

Results are given in the following table; O_2 and CO_2 tensions are given in
 percentages of an atmosphere:

Time (min)	Pressure (atm)	P_{O_2} (%)	P_{CO_2} (%)
0	1.0	15.7	3.7
10	0.8	12.6	2.9
20	0.6	9.5	2.1
30	0.4	6.4	1.3
40	0.2	3.3	0.5
50	0.1	0.2	0.1
60	0.0	0.0	0.0

These results show that the breath-holding time under pressure is roughly
 double that at the surface, and that the breath-holding time with interposed
 decompression is roughly double that again. This further increase may be
 due to the increase in oxygen tension with under pressure, and it also
 shows not to have involved any extension in the physiological breathing cycle.
 It is of interest that a greater advantage is obtained the longer the breath is
 held before the decompression; the concentration of O_2 in the air vented
 and hence the total loss of O_2 is thereby increased. Taking the chest rate
 account, the increase in breath-holding time due to decompression (80-100 sec.)
 are of the order expected, if they were due to a partial vacuum resulting from
 loss of CO_2 in the air vented from the lungs during decompression.