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ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ ПРИМЕНЕНИЯ ГИПОКСИТЕРАПИИ В КАРДИОЛОГИИ

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Possibilities and Prospects of Hypoxytherapy Application in Cardiology

Резюме

Несмотря на достижения современной кардиологии, заболеваемость и смертность от сердечно-сосудистой патологии в большинстве стран мира остается высокой, что мотивирует более широкое использование дополнительных (альтернативных) профилактических и лечебных подходов, одним из которых является гипокситерапия. За несколько десятилетий использования этого метода накоплен обширный объем информации, позволяющий констатировать благоприятное воздействие различных режимов гипокситерапии на выраженность клинической картины сердечно-сосудистых заболеваний, что потенциально может улучшать их прогноз. Применение гипокситерапии ассоциируется с улучшением циркадного ритма артериального давления, поток-зависимой вазодилатации, со снижением инсулинорезистентности, уменьшением жесткости сосудистой стенки, улучшением реологии крови, функции эндотелия и системы оксида азота, снижением уровней провоспалительных и протромботических цитокинов. Ряд авторитетных экспертов рассматривают гипокситерапию в качестве доступного и перспективного метода профилактики и лечения сердечно-сосудистой патологии, эффективно дополняющего традиционные немедикаментозные и медикаментозные подходы. Накопленные данные свидетельствуют о серьезных перспективах расширенного изучения возможностей применения гипокситерапии у кардиологических больных, в том числе в рамках крупных государственных исследовательских программ. Настоящий обзор посвящен рассмотрению физиологических эффектов гипокситерапии, возможностей ее применения в кардиологической практике, в том числе с анализом собственных данных, а также мер предосторожности при ее проведении.

Ключевые слова: гипокситерапия, сердечно-сосудистые заболевания, ишемическое preconditionирование тканей, артериальная гипертензия, ишемическая болезнь сердца

Конфликт интересов

Авторы заявляют, что данная работа, её тема, предмет и содержание не затрагивают конкурирующих интересов

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Abstract

Despite the achievements of modern cardiology, the cardiovascular morbidity and mortality in most countries of the world remains high, which motivates the wider use of additional (alternative) preventive and therapeutic approaches, one of which is hypoxotherapy. Over several decades of

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using this method, a large amount of data has been accumulated that allows us to state the beneficial effect of various hypoxotherapy regimens on the clinical course of cardiovascular diseases and can potentially improve prognosis of them. The use of hypoxotherapy is associated with an improvement in blood pressure circadian rhythm, flow-dependent vasodilation, an insulin resistance decrease, a vascular wall stiffness reduction, an improvement in blood rheology, endothelial function and nitric oxide system, a decrease of proinflammatory and prothrombotic cytokines levels. A number of modern experts consider hypoxotherapy as an affordable and perspective method of prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease, effectively supporting traditional non-drug and drug-based approaches. Contemporary data indicate serious future perspectives for an expanded study of the hypoxotherapy possibilities in cardiac patients, including through the State research programmes. This review is devoted to the discussion of the physiological effects of hypoxotherapy, the possibilities of its application in cardiological practice, including with the analysis of own data, as well as precautions during its implementation.

Key words: *hypoxotherapy, cardiovascular diseases, ischemic tissue preconditioning, arterial hypertension, ischemic heart disease*

Conflict of interests

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AH — arterial hypertension, BP — blood pressure, HOT — hypoxotherapy, CAD — coronary artery disease, CVD — cardiovascular diseases, CHF — congestive heart failure, NO — nitric oxide

Arterial hypertension (AH), coronary artery disease (CAD), congestive heart failure (CHF), cerebrovascular and peripheral vascular disorders are a cause of at least one third of all deaths globally, and their rate in mortality in developed countries is even higher [1, 2]. The leading role of these cardiovascular diseases (CVD) in the structure of causes of deaths globally forces to constantly improve the methods of prevention and treatment [2, 3].

An important achievement in cardiology and internal medicine in general is the widespread understanding of the need in adherence to recommendations to change the lifestyle, including low-salt healthy food, smoking cessation and cutting down on alcohol, moderate physical exercises, reduction of overweight, good sleeping habits and prevention of excessive emotional stress, regular monitoring and correction of blood pressure, blood sugar and lipids [3-6]. Solid achievements in cardiology during the past two decades also include introduction of advanced invasive and minimally invasive approaches (coronary revascularization, implants to control arrhythmias and heart blocks, etc.), approval and wide use of statins for CVD, advances in anti-thrombotic therapy (dual anti-platelet therapy, novel oral anticoagulants), wider use of mineralocorticoid receptor antagonists in AH, use of dual neurohumoral blockade (valsartan plus sacubitril) and gliflozin in CHF [1, 3].

Unfortunately, despite impressive achievements in modern cardiology, desired reduction in CVD mortality and mortality has not yet been observed in a majority of countries all over the world [2]. Therefore, the interest in the use of additional (alternative) preventive and therapeutic approaches has been growing; one of such approaches is exposure to dosed and controlled hypoxia, commonly called hypoxotherapy (HOT). HOT variants

(hypobaric, normobaric oxygenation with or without physical exercises, of various intensity and duration) have been studied for decades [7–10]. Over this period, a lot of information has been gathered allowing to state that HOT has a number of favourable effects, which can reduce the intensity of clinical signs of CVD and has potential for improving the CVD prognosis [11–14]. A number of respectable experts see HOT as a convenient and promising approach to prevent and treat CVD, which is an efficient addition to conservative non-drug and drug methods [8, 15–17]. This literature review is dedicated to discussion of physiological effects of HOT, possible use of various HOT variants in CVD, and precautions for HOT procedures.

Physical Responses to Hypoxia

Exposure to controlled hypoxia causes formation of a complex of various physiological changes in the body [7, 12, 18-20]. A short period of hypoxia, especially intermittent, leads to development of a number of compensatory changes in respiratory and cardiovascular systems. They are designed to maintain sufficient oxygenation of peripheral tissues during hypoxia and potentially have cardiovascular protective effect [7, 10]. Respiratory changes are associated with exposure of carotid chemoreceptors to hypoxia and include hyperventilation, increase in the diffusive capacity of lungs (with an increase in the aero-hematic barrier permeability for respiratory gases — oxygen and carbon dioxide), increase in respiratory minute volume and ventilatory lung capacity, increase in respiratory response to physical activities [7, 12, 21]. Changes in the cardiovascular

system during hypoxia are caused by sympathetic nervous system activation and include increase in the heart rate at rest and during physical activities, increased cardiac output, increased endothelium-dependent and NO-mediated vasodilation, including arteriolar and venous vasodilation, improved endothelium function, reduced blood viscosity, reduced blood pressure (BP), increased hemoglobin oxygen affinity, increased expression of hypoxia-induced factor 1- α (HIF- α) and vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), as well as increased angiogenesis [7, 22]. These processes are closely associated with metabolic changes induced by short-term intermittent hypoxia, including reduced appetite (caused by a shift in hormones regulating food intake and energy balance, including leptin, ghrelin, glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1), pancreatic polypeptide (PP), peptide YY (PYY), serotonin), increased activity of glycolysis enzymes and transmembrane glucose transporter GLUT4, reduced insulin resistance, body weight loss [11, 18, 19]. It was demonstrated that at least some of the above favourable effects of intermittent hypoxia can persist for 3 months after hypoxia termination [10, 21]. From the pathophysiological point of view, a number of authors believe that HOT variants that involve procedures of 20 to 60 minutes/day in sessions of at least 5 days (preferably 10–15 days), repeated once every 3–6 months, are optimal for steady cardiovascular protection [7, 8, 16, 21].

For some pathophysiologicals and clinicians, intermittent hypoxia is a variant of hypoxic/ ischemic tissue preconditioning [7, 18]. This phenomenon comprises a set of biological reactions (changes in regulation of ion channels, ATP-sensitive potassium channels of mitochondria, mitochondria membrane permeability, formation of active oxygen radicals) to increase tissue resistance to effects of hypoxia and ischemia by means of hypoxic training [17]. Metabolic adaptation to mild intermittent ischemic events has been studied mostly for myocardium (and is used for its protection against ischemic/reperfused events during revascularisation); there are some evidences of this phenomenon in brain tissue as well (later it can be useful for brain protection against ischemia) [17, 20, 22]. Interpretation of effects of HOT as a variant of hypoxic/ischemic tissue preconditioning seems promising for the assessment of perspective clinical use of this method, especially in cardiology and neurology [8, 12, 13, 20].

Stable and long-term exposure to hypoxia (e.g., living in high mountain regions) is associated with increased erythropoiesis and reduced cardiac output to the level close to the normoxia [23].

Available hypoxia variants used in clinical settings, including intermittent variants of exposure to normo-

baric and hypobaric dosed hypoxia as well as physical activities during controlled hypoxia lead to similar positive respiratory, cardiovascular and metabolic changes; and it is assumed that their intensity can be higher in hypobaric HOT as compared to normobaric conditions and in HOT with physical activities as compared to HOT without any exercises [19, 23]. Favourable HOT-associated effects can be used for CVD both for prevention and treatment [9, 14, 21, 24].

Clinical Effects of HOT

HOT is promoted as a method of alternative medicine, the advantage of which adds to the possibilities of conventional methods of CVD prevention and treatment [22, 24]. Two HOT variants are worth noting — these are procedures with exposure to various types of dosed hypoxia and physical activities during controlled hypoxia. Both these variants demonstrate a number of positive effects for cardiovascular system and CVD pathophysiology. Let's discuss the possibilities of both these variants of HOT in CVD.

Exposure to dosed hypoxia. The assumption of possible favourable effect of oxygen-deficient air inhalation on CVD is based on the information from epidemiological studies comparing cardiovascular characteristics of those living in high mountain regions and flat-bottom land. The information in such analyses is often ambiguous because of significant diversity of the studied populations in ethnicity, race, gender, physical activity and diet. At the same time, the largest and most respected epidemiological papers evidence reduction in the cardiovascular risk in people living in high mountain regions vs. those living in flat-bottom land. A series of papers by Faeh D. et al. (2009, 2016) assessed the impact of the altitude above sea level on CVD first in 1.64 million, then in 4.2 million of people from various regions in Germany and Switzerland (using the Swiss National Cohort Study Group register) [25, 26]. Results of such large studies quite definitely demonstrated (1) marked favourable effect of living in mountain regions on the risk and progression of CAD; (2) independent protective effect of being born in a high mountain region regarding the risk of CAD; (3) linear dependence of the cardiovascular mortality on the increase of the altitude above sea level. Similar evidence of positive effects of living in a mountain region on the cardiovascular risk was observed in other population studies (Ezzati M. et al., 2012), where analysis was performed by such respected epidemiological sources in the USA as the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Elevation Dataset and the U.S. Census Estimates [27]. The paper by Winkelmayr W.C. et al. (2012) which analysed a US dialysis population also showed

a significantly lower rate of myocardial infarction, cerebral strokes and cardiovascular complications among people living in mountains as compared to people living in flat regions [28].

These promising information from epidemiological registers was used to plan a number of studies where exposure to dosed hypoxia was used for prevention and therapy in various categories of people — healthy people and CVD patients [29–34]. Vedam H. et al. (2009) evaluated the cardiovascular effects of hypoxia with controlled reduction in oxygen saturation to 80 % for 20 minutes in a group of healthy male volunteers [29]. The authors proved that inhalation of an oxygen-deficient air mix results in endothelium-dependent and NO-mediated arterial vasodilation with increased blood flow in skeletal muscles. Leuenberger U.A., et al. (2008) created hypobaric hypoxia conditions in a group of healthy male volunteers; these conditions were similar to those at an altitude of 2438–4877 m above sea level during 20 minutes [30]. They demonstrated that this hypoxia regimen is associated with increased NO production in venous endothelium of skeleton muscles and development of marked hypoxia-induced vasodilation in this blood flow. Another study by Tremblay J.C., et al. (2020) confirmed favourable effects of hypobaric hypoxia on endothelial function in healthy males, including after induced increase in circulating plasma during this study [31].

Cardiovascular effects of HOT were assessed in a number of studies in patients with various CVD. Patients with stage 1 AH demonstrated favourable clinical and pathophysiological effects from 20-day use of intermittent normobaric HOT, presenting as BP reduction and increased NO production [32]. It is worth mentioning that the achieved BP reduction was maintained for over 3 months in 28 out of 33 studied patients. A double-blind study by Burtscher M., et al. (2004) assessed effects of 3-week intermittent HOT (with inspired oxygen fraction (FiO_2) = 0.10–0.14) in 16 males aged 50–70 years, including 8 post-infarct patients and the other 8 patients who did not have myocardial infarction [33]. The authors demonstrated that the use of HOT was associated with improved aerobic capacity and improved tolerance to physical activities in elderly people, both post-infarction patients and those who did not have myocardial infarction. According to another report by del Pilar Valle M., et al. (2006), intermittent hypobaric HOT in patients with severe chronic coronary disorders was associated with marked improvement in myocardial perfusion [34]. The authors used this information to conclude that this method can be a useful addition to conventional management of patients with chronic CAD.

A lot of studies with various HOT variants in CVD (mostly intermittent normobaric HOT) were published

in Russian sources [8, 20, 24, 35]. These papers are based on relatively small cohorts of patients with CVD and generally positive HOT effects and good tolerability. At the same time, patients with arterial hypertension and chronic CAD demonstrated favourable effects of HOT on BP and NO-dependent vasodilation of arterial and venous blood flows. Besides, there were positive effects of HOT on insulin resistance, pro-inflammatory and prothrombotic cytokines, as well as clinical parameters (better physical activity tolerability, reduction in angina functional class) [8, 20, 24, 35].

Numerous studies led by Prof. G. A. Ignatenko are dedicated to the use of normobaric hypoxotherapy as a part of therapy and prevention of arterial hypertension, chronic heart disease, microvascular angina, metabolic syndrome, ischemic pre-conditioning, etc. [24, 36, 37]. Hypoxotherapy addition to a comprehensive therapeutic program for young patients with genetically induced hypertension vs. patients who were treated only with medications allowed reducing the number of complaints (headache, palpitation, irregular heart rate), the rate of uncomplicated and complicated hypertensive crises, extrasystolic arrhythmia and paroxysmal atrial fibrillation, daily average systolic and diastolic blood pressure (BP), total peripheral vascular resistance. Reduction in night-peacker circadian variability with a corresponding increase in the dipper type makes it possible to bring daily pressure fluctuations to physiological values and to minimise night risks associated with cardiac and cerebral blood flow disorders [37]. High efficiency of hypoxotherapy was observed in comorbidities (cardiac pathology and bronchopulmonary, endocrine, renal, prostate gland diseases, etc.). The results of the use of hypoxotherapy in cardiopulmonary disorders observed by the authors make it possible to treat hypoxotherapy as a universal pathogenic therapy which can optimise coronary blood flow, reduce manifestations of bronchial obstruction, cardiac and respiratory insufficiency and improve physical activity tolerability [38]. Hypoxotherapy, a non-drug component of a long-term comprehensive treatment program, can help in improving some parameters that characterise the quality of life (physical functioning, viability, social functioning, role emotional functioning) to the level of healthy people [39].

Physical Activities During Controlled Hypoxia.

A combination of dosed physical activity with exposure to hypoxia leads to the development of marked compensatory arterial vasodilation aimed at maintenance of sufficient oxygen supply to skeletal muscles during oxyhemoglobin deficiency in blood [23, 41]. Physical activities themselves are a potent factor affecting metabolism [16, 40, 41]. During hypoxia, physical activities are associated with reduced oxygen supply to skeletal muscles and

increased oxygen demand, resulting in marked reduction of partial oxygen pressure in mitochondria of engaged muscles [42]. In turn, it is associated with increased NO production by vascular endothelial cells and compensatory vasodilation mobilisation [9, 40, 42]. This process underlines potential vaso- and cardioprotection by load HOT in CVD prevention and treatment.

Cardiovascular effects of a combination of physical activity and hypoxia were studied both in healthy volunteers and patients with CVD. The population of healthy female volunteers studied by Jung K., et al. (2020) demonstrated that pilates during hypobaric hypoxia ($\text{FiO}_2 = 0.145$) vs. normoxia was associated with development of more marked metabolic response (carbon dioxide excretion, carbohydrates oxidation) and more significant vasodilation [43]. Similarly, in the study by Katayama K., et al. (2013), physical activity during hypoxia ($\text{FiO}_2 = 0.12$) in healthy male subjects resulted in more marked endothelium-dependent vasodilation as compared to similar activities during normoxia [44].

There are numerous reports where load HOT was used in post-menopausal women (Nishiwaki M., et al. (2011), hypobaric hypoxia similar to an altitude of approx. 2000 m above sea level [45]), elderly men (Park H., et al. (2019), normobaric hypoxia, $\text{FiO}_2 = 0.145$ [46]), obese women (Jung K., et al. (2020), hypobaric hypoxia [47]), in sportsmen (Zembron-Lacny A., et al. (2020), intermittent hypoxia for 6 days at $\text{FiO}_2 = 0.135\text{--}0.12$ in combination with intensive physical activities [48]). These and some other similar papers (Wee J., et al. (2015) demonstrated that physical activities in combination with HOT are associated with vasodilation, BP reduction, improved functioning of vegetative nervous system, blood rheology, functions of endothelium, lipid profile and glucose tolerability, as well as reduced levels of pro-inflammatory mediators; and all these valuable biological effects were much more marked compared to absence of hypoxia [15].

Effects of load HOT on cardiovascular parameters were studied also in persons with CVD. Muangritdech N., et al. (2020), who analysed the results of the use of intermittent normobaric hypoxia ($\text{FiO}_2 = 0.14$) in combination with dosed physical load in patients with AH and found out that this method results in marked reduction of arterial hypertension, presumably due to such favourable metabolic effects as increased NO metabolite levels and increased HIF- α production [17]. Significant contribution to the study of effects of HOT in patients with CVD was made by outstanding Russian specialists, in particular by the study team led by Academician O. V. Korkushko [49]. These studies demonstrated that, in elderly persons with CAD, intermittent normobaric hypoxia in combination with dosed physical activities

resulted in reduction in angina intensity; according to the authors, this positive effect is due to an improved function of coronary artery endothelium, normalised myocardial microcirculation and optimised oxygen consumption by myocardium. In a series of papers dedicated to HOT and in an analysis summarising data from numerous sources published over the last 50 years, T. V. Serebrovskaya et al. (2014, 2016) defend for a good reason the viewpoint that load HOT can be a very useful therapy complementing modern treatments of most common CVD, including AH, CAD and CHF [8, 35].

Precautions for HOT

For HOT, there are some evidence of a certain favourable potential for the clinical manifestation and course of CVD [29, 31, 33-35, 63]. The two recent decades are remarkable for active studies of the therapeutic effects of HOT, which allowed confirming a number of useful pathophysiological and clinical characteristics of this method and its good tolerability. However, the development of HOT is hindered by the lack of standardisation of the equipment used and hypoxia regimens; therefore, it is not possible to conduct large multicenter studies under an advanced protocol (preferably randomised controlled studies) and this method cannot be added to the Russian and international guidelines for the management of CVD [8, 9, 22].

HOT procedures in persons with CVD require certain precautions [9]. Experts claim that persons undergoing HOT should have stable CVD, without exacerbations and decompensation, because otherwise clinical signs of CVD can increase even in dosed and controlled hypoxia [8, 9]. According to some authors, before HOT a number of tests should be conducted with dosed physical activity with normoxia in order to assess HOT safety [8, 9]. It is essential to keep taking all medications prescribed by the attending physician during HOT, especially statins and antithrombotic agents, without any breaks. During therapy with HOT, it is advised to avoid such potentially unfavourable factors as physical overwork, dehydration, marked changes in the diet and temperature regimen (including overheating, e.g., baths, or hypothermia, e.g., cold training); it is also important to reduce emotional stress (at home, at work, including stress from smoking cessation, etc.). For an optimal result, it is useful to create positive motivation for the patient and their relatives for HOT, to explain positive effects of the procedure and precautions and make sure they comply with a course of at least 5 days long [50]. A decision to initiate HOT should be taken by the doctor; the room where the procedure is performed should be equipped with a CVD first aid kit.

Conclusion

HOT including procedures with exposure to dosed intermittent hypoxia and physical activities during controlled hypoxia are characterised by the development of various favourable pathophysiological and clinical effects in chronic CVD and can be a valuable component of a comprehensive therapy. Positive effects of HOT demonstrated in healthy subjects and CVD patients include improved circadian AH rhythm and flow-associated vasodilation, reduced insulin resistance, reduced vascular wall rigidity, improved blood rheology, endothelial and NO system function, reduced levels of pro-inflammatory and prothrombotic cytokines. This information shows sound perspectives of a deeper study of HOT capabilities in CVD patients, including during large state research programs.

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All the authors contributed significantly to the study and the article, read and approved the final version of the article before publication

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