Whey protein augments leucinemia and post-exercise p70S6K1 activity compared to a hydrolysed collagen blend when in recovery from training with low carbohydrate availability

Samuel G Impey[1], Kelly M Hammond[1], Robert Naughton[1], Carl Langan-Evans[1], Sam O Shepherd[1], Adam P Sharples[1], Jessica Cegielski[2], Kenneth Smith[2], Stewart Jeromson[3], D Lee Hamilton[3], Graeme L Close[1] and James P Morton[1]

[1]Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences
Liverpool John Moores University
Tom Reilly Building
Byrom St Campus
Liverpool
L3 3AF
UK

[2]MRC-ARUK Centre for Musculoskeletal Aging
Research Division of Medical Sciences and Graduate Entry Medicine
School of Medicine Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
University of Nottingham
Royal Derby Hospital Centre
Derby
DE22 3DT

[3]Health and Exercise Sciences Research Group
University of Stirling
Stirling
FK9 4LA

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Address for correspondence:
Dr James Morton
Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences
Liverpool John Moores University
Tom Reilly Building
Byrom St Campus
Liverpool
L3 3AF
United Kingdom
Email: J.P.Morton@ljmu.ac.uk
Tel: +44 151 904 6233

45 **Abstract**

46 We examined the effects of whey versus collagen protein on skeletal muscle cell signalling
47 responses associated with mitochondrial biogenesis and protein synthesis in recovery from an
48 acute training session completed with low carbohydrate (CHO) availability. In a repeated
49 measures design (after adhering to a 36-h exercise-dietary intervention to standardise pre-
50 exercise muscle glycogen), eight males completed a 75-min non-exhaustive cycling protocol
51 and consumed 22 g of a hydrolysed collagen blend (COLLAGEN) or whey (WHEY) protein
52 45 min prior to exercise, 22 g during exercise and 22 g immediately post-exercise. Exercise
53 decreased ($P<0.05$) muscle glycogen content by comparable levels from pre-to post-exercise
54 in both trials (≈ 300 to 150 $mmol.kg^{-1}$ dw). WHEY protein induced greater increases in
55 plasma BCAAs ($P=0.03$) and leucine ($P=0.02$) than COLLAGEN. Exercise induced
56 ($P<0.05$) similar increases in PGC-1α (5-fold) mRNA at 1.5 h post-exercise between
57 conditions though no affect of exercise ($P>0.05$) was observed for p53, Parkin and Beclin1
58 mRNA. Exercise suppressed ($P<0.05$) p70S6K1 activity in both conditions immediately post-
59 exercise (≈ 25 $fmol.min^{-1}.mg^{-1}$). Post-exercise feeding increased p70S6K1 activity at 1.5 h
60 post-exercise ($P<0.05$), the magnitude of which was greater ($P<0.05$) in WHEY (180 ± 105
61 $fmol.min^{-1}.mg^{-1}$) versus COLLAGEN (73 ± 42 $fmol.min^{-1}.mg^{-1}$). We conclude that protein
62 composition does not modulate markers of mitochondrial biogenesis when in recovery from a
63 training session deliberately completed with low CHO availability. In contrast, whey protein
64 augments post-exercise p70S6K activity compared with hydrolysed collagen, as likely
65 mediated via increased leucine availability.

66 **Keywords:** autophagy, p70S6K1, CHO restriction, glycogen

67

68

69 **Introduction**

70 The role of increased dietary protein intake in facilitating skeletal muscle adaptations
71 associated with endurance training is now gaining acceptance (Moore et al. 2014). Indeed,
72 consuming protein before (Coffey et al. 2011), during (Hulston et al. 2011) and/or after
73 (Rowlands et al. 2015) an acute training session stimulates muscle protein synthesis
74 (MPS). Post-exercise protein feeding has also been shown to modify skeletal muscle
75 transcriptome responses towards those supporting the endurance phenotype (Rowlands et al.
76 2011). In considering protein-feeding strategies for athletes, it is pertinent to consider the
77 absolute dose (Moore et al. 2009; Witard et al. 2014; Rowlands et al. 2015; MacNaughton et
78 al. 2016), feeding schedule (West et al., 2011; Areta et al. 2013), digestibility (Burke et al.
79 2012; Phillips, 2016) and source of protein (Tang et al. 2009; Wilkinson et al. 2007).
80 Contemporary guidelines recommend whey protein beverages due to its higher leucine
81 content and rapid aminoacidemia upon ingestion (Thomas et al. 2016), though hydrolysed
82 collagen beverages and gels are now commercially available and marketed to athletic
83 populations. Whilst the use of a gel delivery matrix appears particularly beneficial for
84 endurance athletes given the practical advantages of feeding while in locomotion (Impey et
85 al. 2015), it is noteworthy that collagen based formulations likely have lower leucine content
86 and digestibility compared with whey (Phillips, 2016).

87 With this in mind, the aim of the present study was to therefore examine the effects of two
88 practically relevant protein-feeding strategies (i.e. whey protein solution versus a hydrolysed
89 collagen blend in a gel format) in modulating skeletal muscle cell signalling responses
90 associated with mitochondrial biogenesis and MPS. Given the increased popularity of
91 training with low carbohydrate (CHO) availability (i.e. the train-low paradigm) in an attempt
92 to enhance mitochondrial related adaptations (Hawley and Morton, 2014; Bartlett et al. 2015;
93 Impey et al. 2016; 2018), we adopted an experimental design whereby male cyclists

94 completed a non-exhaustive training session in which glycogen remained within an absolute
95 concentration (i.e. pre-and post-exercise concentrations of <350 and >100 mmol.kg dw^{-1},
96 respectively) considered representative of train-low conditions (Impey et al. 2018).

97

98 **Methodology**

99 ***Subjects:*** After providing informed written consent, eight recreational male cyclists (age: 25
100 ± 3 years; height: 175 ± 0.1 cm; body mass: 74.4 ± 6.7 kg) who trained between 3 – 10 hours
101 per week took part in this study. Mean VO_{2peak} and peak power output (PPO) was 56.5 ± 3.8
102 $ml.kg^{-1}.min^{-1}$ and 327 ± 26 W respectively. None of the participants had a history of
103 neurological disease or skeletal muscle abnormality and none were under pharmacological
104 intervention during the study. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of
105 Liverpool John Moores University.

106 ***Design:*** In a repeated measures counterbalanced design separated by 7-9 days, subjects
107 completed two non-exhaustive acute exercise trials in conditions of reduced CHO availability
108 with whey (WHEY) or a hydrolysed collagen blend (COLLAGEN) provision before, during
109 and after exercise. At 36-40 h prior to the main experimental trials, all subjects performed a
110 glycogen depletion protocol followed by 36 h of low CHO (3 $g.kg.d^{-1}$) and energy intake
111 (~7.58 ± 0.6 $MJ.day^{-1}$) (as replicated from Impey et al. 2016) in order to standardise pre-
112 exercise muscle glycogen content (see Figure 1). Subjects refrained from CHO intake on the
113 morning of the main experimental trial as well as during exercise, but consumed 1.2 g/kg
114 body mass (BM) of CHO split across two equal 0.6 g/kg doses at 30 min and 60 min post
115 exercise in both trials. Subjects consumed 22 g of whey or collagen protein at 45 minutes
116 prior to exercise, 22 g during exercise and a further 22 g immediately post-exercise. Both
117 trials represented deliberate conditions of reduced CHO and absolute energy availability, but

118 with high protein availability in the form of whey or collagen throughout. Muscle biopsies
119 were obtained from the vastus lateralis immediately pre-, post- and at 1.5 h post-exercise.

120 ***Assessment of peak oxygen uptake:*** Participants were assessed for peak oxygen consumption
121 (VO_{2peak}) and peak aerobic power (PPO) as determined during an incremental cycle test
122 performed on an electromagnetically braked cycle ergometer as previously described (Impey
123 et al. 2015).

124 ***Experimental Protocol:***

125 ***Day 1 and 2:*** Participants arrived at the laboratory on the evening (17.00) of day 1. Subjects
126 then performed an intermittent glycogen-depleting cycling protocol lasting ~120 min (as
127 described by Impey et al. 2016). This protocol and all subsequent cycling protocols were
128 conducted on a fully adjustable electromagnetically braked cycle ergometer (Lode Excalibur,
129 Netherlands). The activity pattern and total time to exhaustion (115 ± 5 min; Energy
130 expenditure: 1444 ± 107 kJ) were recorded and repeated exactly during the second
131 experimental condition. Participants then consumed a diet low in carbohydrate (3 $g.kg^{-1}$ BM)
132 but high in protein (2 $g.kg^{-1}$ BM) over the next 36 h to minimise muscle glycogen
133 replenishment to ~300-350 $mmol.kg^{-1}$ dw on the morning of the main experimental trial.
134 During this 36 h period prior to the main experimental trial, total energy intake equated to
135 7.58 ± 0.6 MJ. Estimated energy expenditure (as calculated from resting metabolic rate using
136 the Harris Benedict equation and PAL level of 1.4 for the sedentary period on Day 2) was 15.
137 9 ± 1.1 MJ and hence energy balance was – 8.4 ± 0.45 MJ.

138 ***Day 3:*** Subjects reported to the laboratory in a fasted state and an indwelling cannula (Safety
139 Lock 22G, BD Biosciences, West Sussex UK) was inserted into the anticubital vein in the
140 anterior crease of the forearm. Blood samples were collected immediately prior to and every
141 15 minutes during exercise as well as at 30 minute intervals in the recovery period from

142 exercise. Subjects consumed 22 g of protein from one of two commercially available
143 products consisting of a hydrolysed collagen blend in a gel format (COLLAGEN: Muscle
144 Gel, Muscle Pharm, USA; Ingredients: water, hydrolysed collagen, whey protein isolate,
145 dietary fibre, natural flavours, citric acid, ascorbic acid, malic acid, niacinamide, sodium
146 benzoate, potassium sorbate, sucralose, calcium D pantothenate, pyridoxine HCL, riboflavin)
147 or a whey protein solution (WHEY: Whey Protein, Science in Sport, Nelson, UK;
148 Ingredients: whey protein concentrate, whey protein isolate, fat reduced cocoa powder,
149 natural flavourings, xanthan gum, soy lecithin, sucralose) at 45 minutes prior to beginning
150 exercise. Due to the clear differences in delivery methods of protein sources (i.e. gel versus
151 solutions), neither single nor double blinding of treatments occurred. Fluid intake was
152 matched in both conditions to 500 ml at this time-point. Subjects then rested for 45 minutes
153 prior to commencing exercise. Protein was given 45 min prior to exercise in an attempt to
154 maintain elevated circulatory amino acid availability during the exercise protocol (Impey et
155 al. 2015). Following a 5 min warm up at 150 W, subjects then completed a prescribed cycling
156 protocol consisting of 4 x 30 seconds high intensity intervals at 200% PPO interspersed with
157 2.5 min active recovery at 40% PPO, followed by 45 min steady state cycling at 60% PPO
158 and finally, 3 x 3min intervals at 90% PPO. During the HIT and steady state component,
159 subjects ingested 7.3g of COLLAGEN or WHEY protein every 20 min to provide 22 g of
160 protein per hour. Physiological and perceptual measures were recorded at regular intervals
161 throughout exercise (e.g. heart rate, RPE) and substrate utilisation was assessed during the
162 steady state component of the exercise protocol using online gas analysis (CPX Ultima,
163 Medgraphics, Minnesota, US) according to Jeukendrup and Wallis (2005). Following
164 completion of the training session, subjects consumed an additional 22 g of COLLAGEN or
165 WHEY protein immediately post-exercise as well as $1.2 g.kg^{-1}$ BM carbohydrate in the form
166 of sports drinks (Science in Sport, Nelson, UK) and snacks (Jaffacakes, UK) split as equal

167 doses of 0.6 g.kg^{-1} BM at 30 and 60 minutes post-exercise. Laboratory conditions remained
168 constant across all experimental trials (19 – 21°C, 40 – 50% humidity).

169 **Muscle biopsies:** Muscle biopsies were obtained from separate incision sites (2 – 3 cm apart)
170 from the lateral portion of the vastus lateralis muscle. Biopsies were obtained using a Bard
171 Monopty Disposable Core Biopsy Instrument (12 guage x 10 cm length, Bard Biopsy
172 Systems, Tempe, AZ, USA). Samples were obtained under local anaesthesia (0.5% marcaine)
173 and immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at – 80°C for later analysis.

174 **Blood analysis:** Blood samples were collected in vacutainers containing K_2 EDTA, lithium
175 heparin or serum separation tubes, and stored on ice or at room temperature until
176 centrifugation at 1500 g for 15 min at 4℃. Serum and plasma were aliquoted and stored at -
177 80℃ until analysis. Plasma glucose, lactate, non-esterifed fatty acids (NEFA), glycerol, β-
178 hydroxybutyrate (β-OHB), insulin and amino acids were analysed as previously described
179 (Impey et al. 2016).

180 **RNA extraction and analysis and Reverse transcriptase quantitative Real-Time**
181 **Polymerase Chain Reaction (rt-qRT-PCR):** Muscle samples (~ 20 mg) were immersed and
182 homogenized in 1ml TRIzol (Thermo Fisher Scientific, UK). RNA was extracted according
183 to the manufacturer's instructions. RNA concentration and purity were assessed by UV
184 spectroscopy at ODs of 260 and 280 nm using a Nanodrop 3000 (Fisher, Rosklide,
185 Denmark). 70 ng RNA was used for each PCR reaction. Primer were purchased from Sigma
186 (Suffolk, UK) and forward (F) and reverse (R) sequences were as follows: PGC-1 (F:
187 TGCATGAGTGTGTGCTCTGT; R: CAGCACACTCGATGTCACTC), p53 (F:
188 ACCTATGGAAACTACTTCCTGAAA; R: CTGGCATTCTGGGAGCTTCA), Parkin (F:
189 TCCCAGTGGAGGTCGATTCT; R: GGAACCCCCTGTCGCTTAG), Beclin1 (F:
190 ATCTCGAGAAGGTCCAGGCT; R: TCTGGGCATAACGCATCTGG). rt-qRT-PCR

191 amplifications were performed using QuantiFast™ SYBR® Green RT-PCR one step kit on a
192 Rotogene 3000Q (Qiagen, Crawley, UK) supported by rotogene software (Hercules, CA,
193 USA). Detailed procedures are described by Impey et al. (2016).

194 **Muscle glycogen concentration:** Muscle glycogen concentration was determined from 10-
195 20 mg muscle tissue according to the acid hydrolysis method described previously (Impey et
196 al. 2016). Glucose concentrations were quantified using a commercially available kit (GLUC-
197 HK, Randox Laboratories, Antrim, UK).

198 **[γ-^{32}P] ATP Kinase Assay:** Twenty mg muscle tissue was used for the measurement of
199 p70S6K1 and PKB (Akt) activity as previously described (McGlory et al. 2014).

200 **Statistics:** Statistical analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social
201 Scientist (SPSS version 21). Changes in physiological and molecular responses between
202 conditions (i.e. muscle glycogen, circulatory metabolites, amino acids, mRNA and kinase
203 activity) were analysed using two way repeated measures General Linear Model, where the
204 within factors were time and condition. Where a significant main effect was observed,
205 pairwise comparisons were analysed according to Bonferoni post hoc tests in order to locate
206 specific differences. A P value < 0.05 was deemed significant and all data in text, figures and
207 tables are presented as mean ± SD.

208

209 **Results**

210 ***Physiological and metabolic responses to exercise***

211 Exercise intensity and substrate metabolism during the steady state component of the exercise
212 protocol is displayed in Table 1. No significant differences (P>0.05) were observed between
213 trials for any parameter. Exercise reduced (P<0.001) muscle glycogen stores to comparable

214 levels (150 mmol.kg^{-1} dw) with no difference (P=0.485) between conditions (Table 2).
215 Plasma NEFA, glycerol and β-OHB increased during exercise (P<0.001) though plasma
216 glucose did not display any change (P = 0.112) (Figure 2 A, B, C and D, respectively).
217 Changes in plasma NEFA availability across the whole sampling period were suppressed in
218 WHEY compared with the COLLAGEN trial (P=0.046) whereas no differences were
219 observed between trials for glycerol (P=0.080), β-OHB (P = 0.070) or glucose (P=0.963).
220 Despite differences in NEFA availability during exercise, no differences were observed in
221 either CHO (P=0.640) or lipid oxidation (P=0.750) during the steady state component of the
222 exercise protocols (Table 1, respectively).

223 ***Markers of mitochondrial adaptations***

224 The magnitude of the exercise-induced increase (P = 0.001) in PGC-1α mRNA expression at
225 90 min post-exercise was not different (P = 0.731) between trials (Figure 3A). Neither
226 exercise (P = 0.354) nor experimental condition (P = 0.472) affected p53 mRNA expression
227 (Figure 3B). As markers of mitophagy, Parkin mRNA displayed no effect of exercise (P =
228 0.417) or experimental condition (P = 0.301), whereas Beclin 1 displayed a trend towards an
229 effect of exercise (P = 0.058) but no effect of condition (P = 0.968).

230

231 ***Plasma amino acids, serum insulin and p70S6K1 related signalling***

232 Plasma leucine, BCAAs and EAAs all displayed a significant main effect of time (P=0.043,
233 0.028 and 0.021, respectively) during the sampling period (Figure 4 A, B, C respectively).
234 Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that leucine and BCAAs were significantly different
235 from pre-exercise after 30 and 45 minutes of exercise and that BCAAs were also different
236 from pre-exercise values after 30, 60 and 90 minutes of recovery. Such main effects of time

237 appear to be predominantly due to those changes occurring in the WHEY trial given that no
238 differences are apparent in the COLLAGEN trial. Additionally, leucine (P=0.02) and BCAA
239 concentrations (P=0.03) also demonstrated a main effect for condition such that WHEY was
240 greater than COLLAGEN whereas differences in EAA between trials only approached
241 statistical significance (P=0.060). When expressed as AUC data, only plasma leucine
242 (P=0.025) was different between trials whereas AUC for BCAA (P=0.135) and EAA
243 (P=0.062) were not different (data not shown).

244 In accordance with post-exercise CHO intake, insulin increased from pre- and post-exercise
245 values (P = 0.034) though the magnitude of change was not different between trials (P =
246 0.159) (Figure 4D). As such, no difference (P=0.187) was apparent between trials for insulin
247 AUC data (data now shown)

248 PKB activity was elevated at 90 min post-exercise (P = 0.003) compared with pre-exercise
249 values, irrespective of nutritional condition (P=0.370) (Figure 4E). Exercise suppressed
250 (P=0.015) p70S6K activity to comparable levels immediately post-exercise (≈ 25 $fmol.min^{-}$
251 $^{1}.mg^{-1}$). However, post-exercise feeding increased p70S6K activity at 1.5 h post-exercise
252 (P=0.004), the magnitude of which was greater (P=0.046) in WHEY (180 ± 105 $fmol.min^{-}$
253 $^{1}.mg^{-1}$) versus COLLAGEN (73 ± 42 $fmol.min^{-1}.mg^{-1}$) (Figure 4F).

254

255 **Discussion**

256 We examined the effects of whey versus collagen protein on skeletal muscle cell signalling
257 responses associated with mitochondrial biogenesis and protein synthesis in recovery from an
258 acute training session completed with low CHO availability. We deliberately studied two
259 forms of protein feeding that we consider have practical relevance for endurance athletes i.e.

260 a whey protein solution versus a hydrolysed collagen blend administered in a gel format. We
261 also adopted an acute training session intended to mimic situations in which endurance
262 athletes deliberately train with low endogenous and exogenous CHO availability in an
263 attempt to promote oxidative training adaptations (Impey et al. 2018). Whilst we observed no
264 effects of protein composition on acute adaptations associated with mitochondrial biogenesis,
265 whey protein induced greater leucinemia and post-exercise activity of p70S6K activity than
266 collagen.

267 In accordance with the well-documented differences in amino acid composition between
268 whey and collagen (Castellanos et al. 2006), we observed marked differences in the extent of
269 leucinemia induced by the two protein feeding strategies. In this regard, leucine was elevated
270 to a greater extent with the whey protein solution when compared with the hydrolysed
271 collagen gel format. In agreement with previous reports from our laboratory (Taylor et al.
272 2013) and others (Breen et al. 2011), we observed that amino acid availability does not
273 apparently modulate acute markers of mitochondrial adaptations. In contrast, we observed
274 whey protein induced greater increases in post-exercise p70S6K activity. The effects of post-
275 exercise whey protein consumption on activation of the mTOR-p70S6K pathway is well
276 documented (Phillips, 2016) and hence, the greater effect of whey compared with collagen on
277 activation of p70S6K is likely related to the increased leucine availability (Moberg et al.
278 2014; Apro et al. 2015a). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that direct assessment of muscle
279 protein synthesis using stable isotope or deuterium methods would have provided greater
280 insight to the functional relevance of the nutritional strategies used here. In addition, future
281 studies could also assess if such divergent signalling responses are still apparent if the
282 collagen formulation was fortified with additional leucine content to match that of the whey
283 solution.

284 Although we readily acknowledge that the total leucine delivery in the WHEY trial may
285 appear excessive in terms of that required to facilitate protein synthesis as well as likely
286 resulting in elevated leucine oxidation (as suggested by the fall in leucine and BCAA after 30
287 and 45 minutes of exercise), we deliberately chose this dosing strategy for a number of
288 practical reasons. Firstly, given that exercising in CHO restricted states augments leucine
289 oxidation (Lemon and Mullin, 1980; Wagenmakers et al. 1991; Howarth et al. 2009), it was
290 our deliberate aim to administer higher exogenous leucine so as to deliver both substrate to
291 promote muscle protein synthesis (Breen et al. 2011; Pasiakos et al. 2011; Churchward-
292 Venne et al. 2013) but yet, also compensate for the higher levels of endogenous leucine
293 oxidation (Lemon and Mullin, 1980; Howarth et al. 2009). Second, unpublished observations
294 by the corresponding author on elite professional cyclists indicated that this is the type of
295 protein feeding strategy actually adopted during morning training rides that are deliberately
296 undertaken in the absence of CHO intake before and during exercise. As such, our aim was
297 to replicate these "real world" strategies and determine the effects of such high protein
298 availability on substrate metabolism and post-exercise signalling responses. Finally, given
299 that many elite cyclists are potentially in daily energy deficits (Vogt et al. 2005) with low
300 energy availability (Loucks et al. 2011), and also that 3 g/kg body mass of daily protein has
301 been recommended to maintain lean mass during energy restriction (Stokes et al. 2018), we
302 therefore considered this feeding strategy to be in accordance with daily protein intakes for
303 both quantity and frequency (Areta et al. 2013). For example, over the 3.5 h data collection
304 period (i.e. 9 am to 1230 pm), the present subjects (ranging from 70-80 kg) consumed 66 g
305 protein and hence for the daily target to be achieved (i.e. approximately 210-240 g), our
306 approach is therefore in accordance with a feeding strategy where subsequent 30-40 g doses
307 could be consumed at 3 h intervals (e.g. 1, 3, 6 and 9 pm if required).

308 When considered in combination with our recent data (Impey et al. 2016; Hammond et al.
309 2016), the present study also adds to our understanding of the regulation of p70S6K activity
310 both during and after exercise. Indeed, whereas other researchers have reported that acute
311 endurance exercise does not suppress post-exercise p70S6K phosphorylation (Coffey et al.
312 2006) or activity (Apro et al. 2015b), we have consistently observed an exercise-induced
313 suppression in p70S6K activity. We suggest that such differences between studies may be
314 due to the magnitude of energy deficit associated with the CHO restriction and glycogen
315 taxing exercise protocols used both here and previously (Impey et al. 2016). Indeed, whilst it
316 is difficult to directly compare the total energy expenditure between this study and the data of
317 Apro et al. (2015b), the exercise intervention studied here elicited considerably lower muscle
318 glycogen concentrations (i.e. ~150 mmol.kg^{-1}dw vs 350 mmol.kg^{-1}dw). The potential effects
319 of low muscle glycogen availability on post-exercise signalling (albeit in response to
320 resistance exercise) was also evidenced by Camera et al. (2012) who observed that low
321 muscle glycogen availability (i.e. 150-200 mmol.kg^{-1}dw) reduced mTOR phosphorylation
322 compared with higher glycogen concentration (i.e. 350-400 mmol.kg^{-1}dw). Nonetheless,
323 these workers also observed the apparent disconnect between snapshots of cell signalling and
324 functional outcomes given that glycogen concentrations did not affect myofibrillar protein
325 synthesis.

326 In relation to the re-activation of p70S6K activity in the recovery period from exercise, it is
327 noteworthy that we previously observed that the sustained presence of reduced CHO (and
328 energy availability) and/or high post-exercise fat availability also suppresses the re-activation
329 of p70S6K1, even when leucine enriched whey protein was consumed in the post-exercise
330 period (Impey et al. 2016). Based on these studies, we therefore suggested that the apparent
331 suppression of p70S6K1 activity may be due to 1) reduced insulin and PKB signalling or, 2)
332 a direct effect of increased fat availability (Kimball et al. 2015) and/or reduced glycogen

333 mediating suppression of mTORC1 complex via energetic stress related mechanisms. The
334 present data lend support for the latter mechanism for several reasons. First, we observed
335 that the whey-induced increase in p70S6K1 activity when compared with collagen feeding
336 was independent of post-exercise insulin and PKB activity. Second, at the termination of
337 exercise (i.e. the 75 min time point that corresponds low muscle glycogen availability and
338 energy deficit) the absolute circulating NEFA concentrations observed in our collagen trial
339 (i.e. approximately 1.5 $mmol.L^{-1}$) was similar to that achieved with both CHO restriction
340 (Impey et al. 2016) and post-exercise high fat feeding protocols (Hammond et al. 2016). The
341 apparent suppression of NEFA in the WHEY trial may be due to the higher insulin responses
342 associated with feeding whey protein before and during exercise (Impey et al. 2015; Taylor et
343 al. 2013), thereby causing a reduction in lipolysis that manifests itself as reduced circulating
344 NEFA availability during the exercise period. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the current
345 assessments of insulin concentration were limited to pre-and post-exercise time-points per se.
346 We also acknowledge the limitations associated with making inferences on muscle free fatty
347 acid (FFA) uptake on snapshot assessments of circulating NEFA per se. Nonetheless, given
348 recent data demonstrating that acute increases in fat availability (as achieved via lipid
349 infusion protocols) impairs MPS in human skeletal muscle despite similar circulating insulin
350 and leucine concentrations (Stephens et al. 2015), it remains possible that subtle alterations in
351 FFA availability (as caused by "acute" dietary manipulations) can have associated
352 implications on mTOR related signalling. When considered with previous studies (Impey et
353 al. 2016; Hammond et al. 2016), the present data suggest that in those exercise conditions in
354 which muscle glycogen is near depletion, the beneficial effects of whey protein (i.e. leucine
355 mediated activation of mTOR) are especially apparent when co-ingested with post-exercise
356 CHO feeding. Whilst there may be benefits of commencing training with reduced
357 endogenous and exogenous CHO availability, we suggest the post-exercise meal should

358 contain a combination of both protein and CHO, the latter to provide the necessary substrate,
359 energy and metabolic environment to stimulate cell signalling processes.

360 In summary, we demonstrate that when in recovery from an acute training session undertaken
361 with low CHO and energy availability, whey protein induces greater leucinemia and post-
362 exercise p70S6K activity compared with a hydrolysed collagen blend. Data suggest that
363 hydrolysed collagen blends are a sub-optimal protein source in relation to the goal of
364 stimulating those signalling pathways that regulate muscle protein synthesis. Future studies
365 are now required to directly assess the acute effects of whey versus collagen protein feeding
366 on muscle protein synthesis as well as to examine the long-term effects of such feeding
367 strategies on training-induced skeletal muscle adaptations and performance outcomes.

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517 the paper.

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519 **Figure 1**. Schematic representation of the experimental design. On the evening of day 1,
520 subjects completed a glycogen depleting protocol followed by consumption of 22 g of whey
521 protein. Throughout the entirety of day 2, subjects consumed a low CHO and low energy
522 dietary protocol that was matched for both protein and fat intake. During the main
523 experimental trial on day 3, subjects ingested 22 g of collagen (COLLAGEN) or whey
524 (WHEY) protein before, during and after completion of an acute train-low exercise protocol.
525 In addition to protein, subjects also consumed CHO (0.6 $g.kg^{-1}$ BM) at 30 min and 1 h post-
526 exercise. Muscle biopsies were obtained immediately pre-exercise, post-exercise and 1.5 h
527 post-exercise. This experimental protocol represents an amalgamation of train-low
528 paradigms as subjects effectively performed sleep low on the evening of day 1, consumed a
529 low CHO diet on day 2 and finally, completed an acute training session on the morning of
530 day 3 with CHO restricted before and during exercise.

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532 **Figure 2**. Plasma (A) NEFA, (B) glycerol, (C) βOHB and (D) Glucose during and in
533 recovery from exercise. Shaded area represents exercise duration. * $P<0.05$ significant
534 difference from pre-exercise (i.e. time-point 0), ^ $P<0.05$ significant main effect of condition.

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536 **Figure 3**. mRNA expression of (A) PGC-1α, (B) p53, (C) Parkin and (D) Beclin1. * $P<0.05$
537 significant difference from pre-exercise.

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539 **Figure 4**. Plasma (A) leucine, (B) total BCAA, (C) total EAA and (D) insulin. Kinase
540 activity of (E) PKB and (F) p70S6K. Shaded area represents exercise duration. *$P<0.05$
541 significant difference from pre-exercise, **$P<0.05$ significant difference from post-exercise,
542 ^$P<0.05$ significant main effect of condition.

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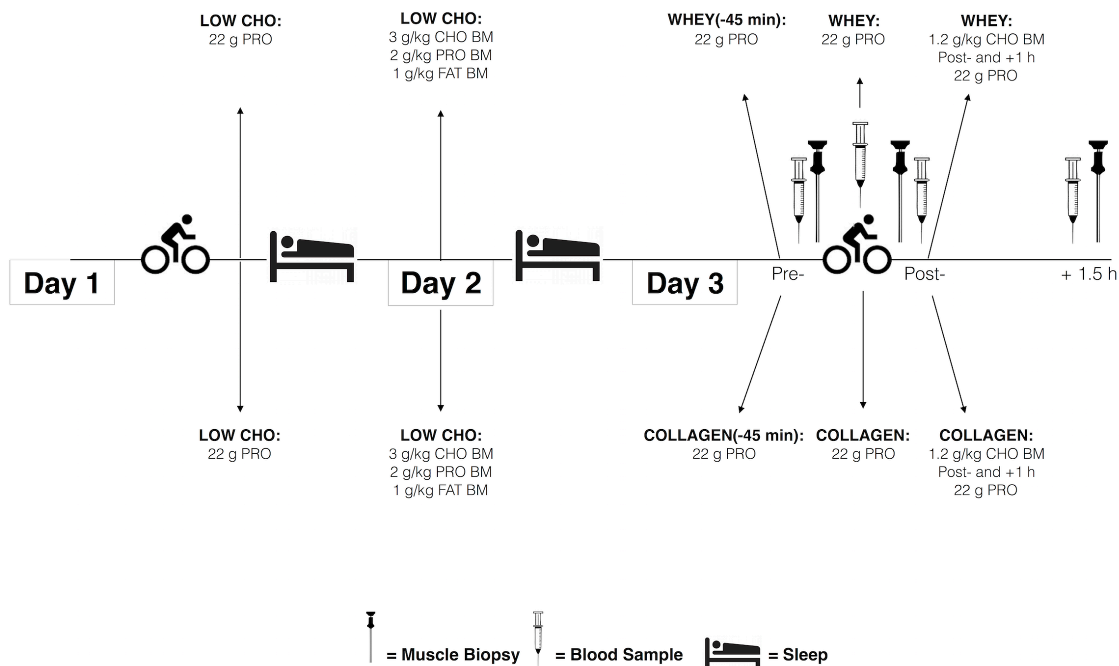
553 **Figure 1**



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564 **Figure 2**

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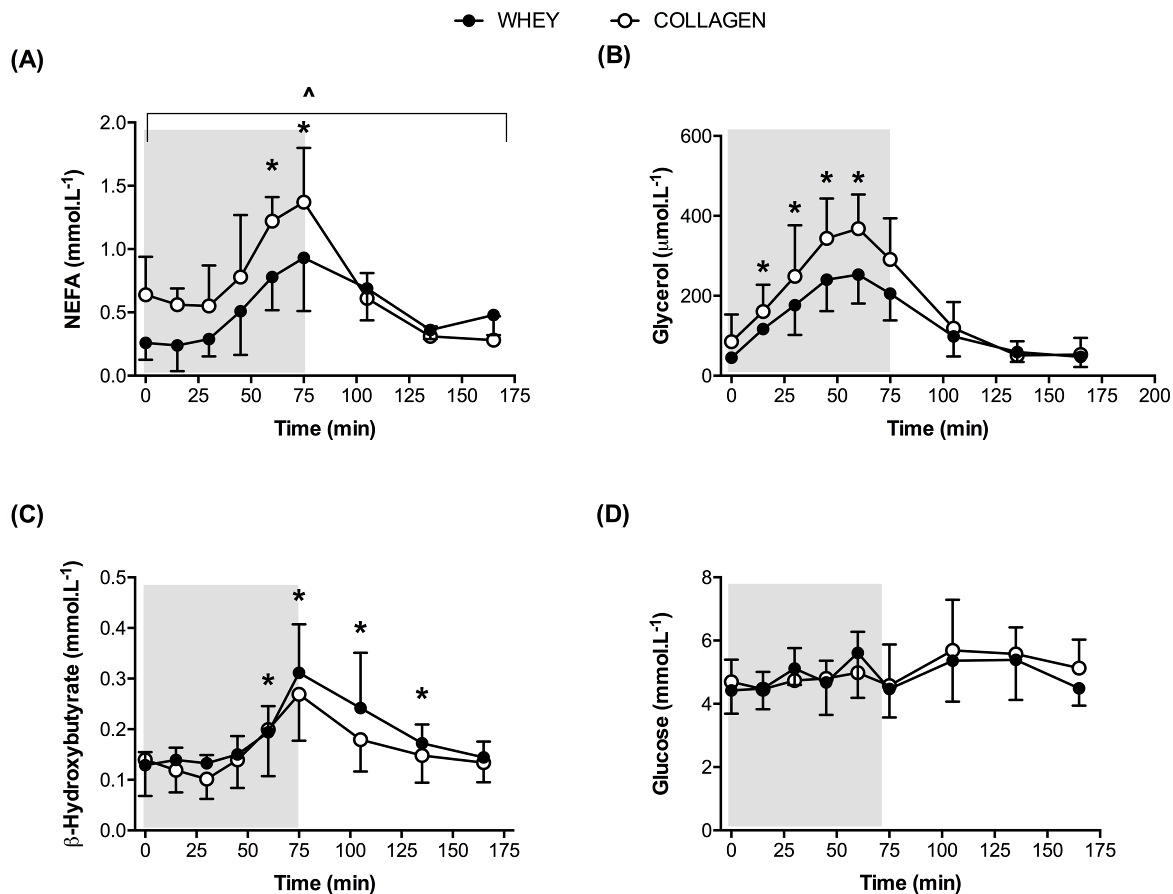

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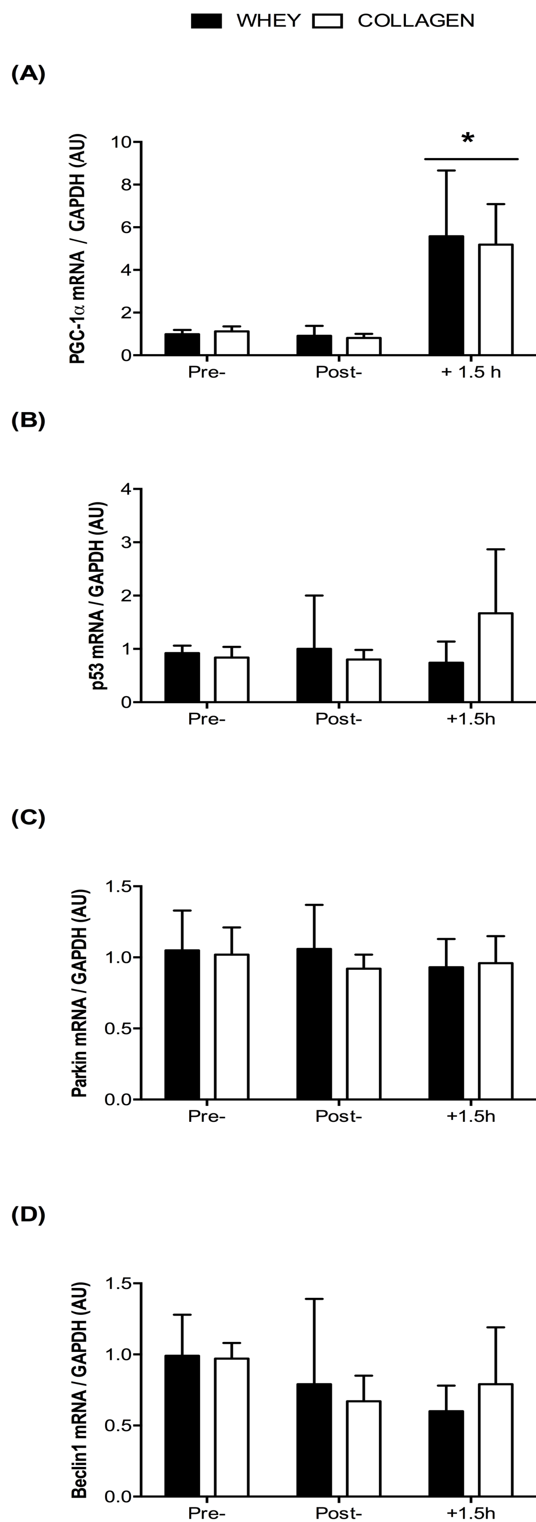
573 **Figure 3**



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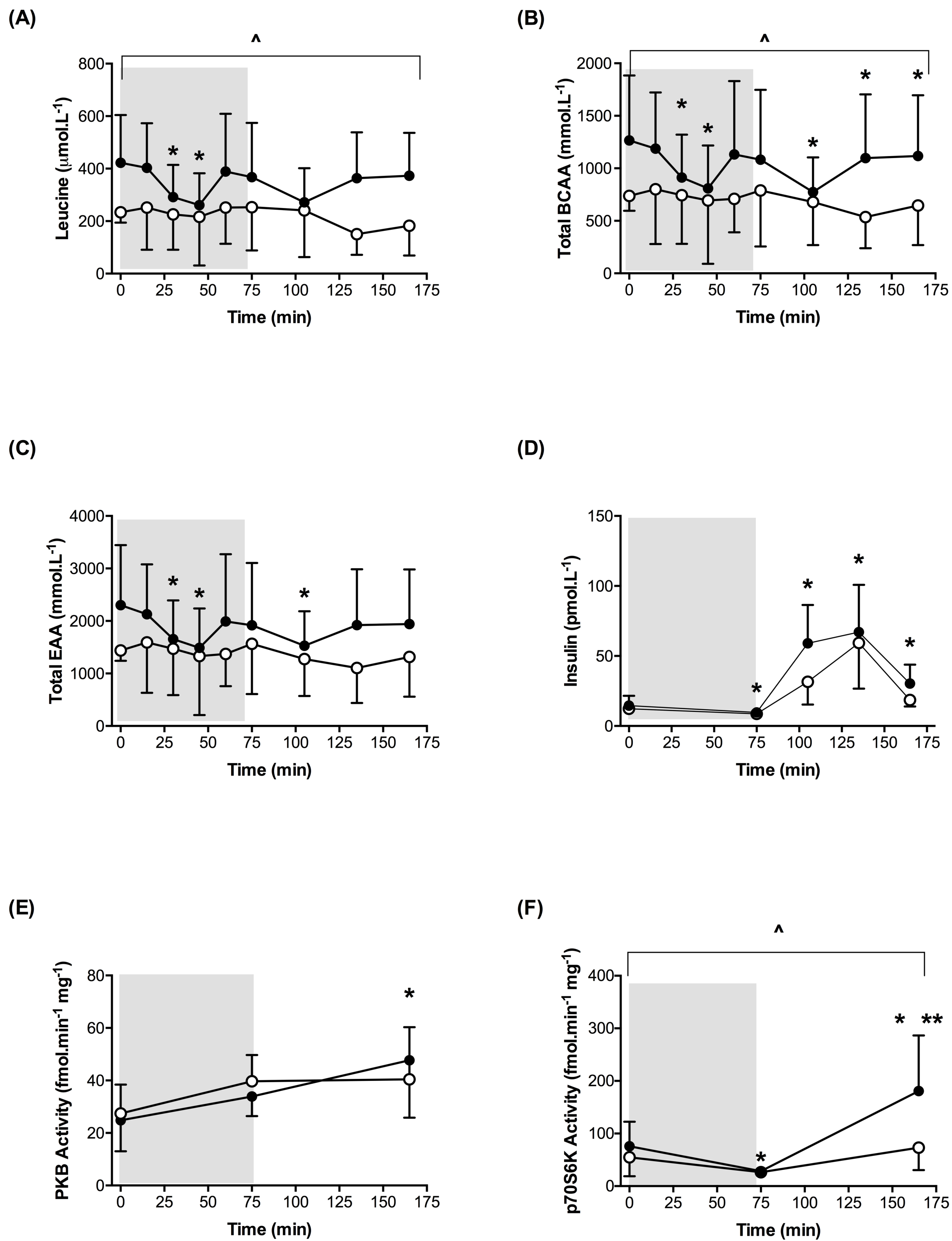
577 **Figure 4**



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581 **Table 1** – Exercise intensity and substrate metabolism during the steady state component of the
582 exercise protocol.

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	Time (min)		
	15	30	45
VO_2 (% VO_{2max})			
WHEY	66 ± 1	67 ± 2	68 ± 2
COLLAGEN	67 ± 2	67 ± 1	68 ± 1
Heart Rate ($b.min^{-1}$)			
WHEY	165 ± 12	167 ± 12	166 ± 12
COLLAGEN	167 ± 6	168 ± 8	168 ± 8
RER (AU)			
WHEY	0.86 ± 0.05	0.86 ± 0.05	0.86 ± 0.06
COLLAGEN	0.86 ± 0.05	0.87 ± 0.03	0.86 ± 0.03
CHO Oxidation ($g.min^{-1}$)			
WHEY	1.9 ± 0.8	1.9 ± 0.8	1.9 ± 0.9
COLLAGEN	2.1 ± 0.6	2.1 ± 0.6	2.1 ± 0.6
Lipid Oxidation ($g.min^{-1}$)			
WHEY	0.7 ± 0.4	0.7 ± 0.3	0.7 ± 0.4
COLLAGEN	0.6 ± 0.2	0.6 ± 0.2	0.7 ± 0.2

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603 **Table 2** – Muscle glycogen concentration before and after exercise. * denotes significant different
604 from pre-exercise, P<0.05.

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	Time (min)		
	Pre-	Post-	+ 90 min
Glycogen (mmol.kg^{-1} dw)			
WHEY	339 ± 66	158 ± 80 *	183 ± 35 *
COLLAGEN	356 ± 44	141 ± 25 *	173 ± 23 *

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