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Development of a Prescriptive Evidence-Aggregation System for Athletic Performance, Recovery, and Injury Rehabilitation

Ansh Riyal, Taruna Agarwal, John Leddo, Dev Agarwal, Sophia Kim, Rishik Uppalapati, Dhruv, Suri, Arjan Dhillon, Shree Garg, Dhairya Garg, Rumina Khan, Rushika Kuppuri, Rishik Vanga, Vibhum Vanga, Mahathi Girla, Maahika Challagulla, Srikaran Yelimati, Aarnavi Burugu, Tatva Duggineni, Diya Doshi

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ABSTRACT

Athletic performance is influenced by nutrition, exercise prescription, sleep, recovery, supplementation, psychology, and injury-management practices. Although thousands of studies have examined these variables, athletes and coaches often struggle to translate scientific findings into individualized recommendations. This paper proposes a comprehensive framework for a prescriptive evidence-aggregation system that continuously reviews scientific literature and generates personalized recommendations. Unlike descriptive systems that summarize evidence or predictive systems that estimate future outcomes, prescriptive systems identify actions most likely to achieve desired goals. The framework integrates systematic review methodology, evidence weighting, meta-analytic principles, machine learning, and optimization algorithms. Evidence from sports nutrition, exercise physiology, recovery science, sleep research, supplementation, and rehabilitation is reviewed. The proposed architecture is intended to improve athletic performance, accelerate recovery, reduce injury risk, and support long-term health. The paper concludes with methodological recommendations, validation strategies, and future research directions.

Introduction

The scientific study of athletic performance has expanded dramatically over the past several decades. Researchers have investigated training methods, nutrition, supplementation, recovery modalities, psychological interventions, and injury-prevention strategies. As a result, the evidence base available to coaches and athletes has become increasingly complex. While evidence-based practice remains the gold standard for decision-making, the volume of research makes comprehensive evaluation difficult.

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A prescriptive model is designed to answer a practical question: What should an athlete do to maximize desired outcomes? Prescriptive systems differ from descriptive systems, which summarize observations, and predictive systems, which forecast future outcomes. Prescriptive systems identify interventions expected to produce optimal results given a set of constraints and goals.

The purpose of the present paper is to describe a framework for developing an evidence-based prescriptive recommendation engine for athletic performance and recovery. The proposed framework integrates scientific literature, evidence weighting, personalization, and machine-learning methods to generate recommendations tailored to individual athletes.

Literature Review: Sports Nutrition

Sports nutrition is one of the most extensively researched areas of performance science. Carbohydrate availability influences glycogen storage, endurance capacity, and recovery from prolonged exercise (Burke, Hawley, Wong, & Jeukendrup, 2011). Athletes participating in endurance sports often benefit from strategic carbohydrate periodization, which aligns carbohydrate intake with training demands.

Protein intake influences muscle protein synthesis, tissue repair, and training adaptation. Phillips and Van Loon (2011) reported that athletes generally require higher protein intakes than sedentary individuals, particularly during periods of intense training. Evidence suggests that both total protein intake and protein distribution across meals influence outcomes.

Dietary fat contributes to hormone production, cellular integrity, and energy metabolism. Mediterranean-style dietary patterns have been associated with improved cardiometabolic health and reduced inflammation. Micronutrients such as iron, vitamin D, magnesium, calcium, and zinc influence metabolic pathways relevant to performance and recovery.

Emerging research supports personalized nutrition approaches. Individual differences in metabolism, body composition goals, food preferences, and training loads suggest that population-wide recommendations may not be optimal for all athletes.

Literature Review: Exercise Prescription

Exercise prescription variables include intensity, volume, frequency, density, exercise selection, and progression. Resistance training consistently improves muscular strength, power, and hypertrophy (Kraemer & Ratamess, 2004). Endurance training improves aerobic capacity and mitochondrial function.

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) has emerged as a particularly efficient method for improving both aerobic and anaerobic performance. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that HIIT may produce substantial cardiovascular adaptations while requiring less training time than traditional endurance methods.

Periodization remains a foundational concept in exercise programming. Linear, undulating, block, and conjugate approaches have demonstrated effectiveness under specific circumstances. However, individual responsiveness varies considerably. Research increasingly supports adaptive training systems that modify workloads based on athlete readiness, recovery status, and performance trends.

Monitoring technologies, including heart-rate variability, wellness questionnaires, wearable sensors, and training-load metrics, provide opportunities for data-driven decision-making and individualized recommendations.

Literature Review: Recovery Science and Sleep

Recovery science has become a major area of investigation because adaptation occurs during recovery rather than during training itself. Sleep consistently emerges as one of the strongest predictors of athletic performance and recovery (Fullagar et al., 2015). Sleep deprivation impairs reaction time, decision-making, endocrine function, and recovery processes.

Studies examining sleep extension suggest that increasing sleep duration can improve sprint performance, mood, cognitive function, and sport-specific skills. Consequently, sleep optimization should be a central component of any performance recommendation system.

Recovery interventions such as active recovery, cold-water immersion, contrast therapy, massage, compression garments, and mobility work have produced mixed findings. Context appears to be critical. Some interventions may reduce soreness and improve perceived recovery, whereas others may influence physiological adaptation.

Psychological recovery also contributes to overall performance. Chronic stress can impair recovery through endocrine and autonomic mechanisms. Mindfulness-based interventions, stress-management practices, and psychological skills training may improve recovery capacity and performance consistency.

Literature Review: Supplementation

Creatine monohydrate remains one of the most extensively studied ergogenic aids in sports science. Research consistently demonstrates benefits for strength, power, lean mass development, and repeated-sprint performance (Kreider et al., 2017).

Caffeine enhances alertness, endurance, reaction time, and perceived exertion (Grgic et al., 2020). Beta-alanine increases muscle carnosine concentrations and may improve performance during high-intensity efforts lasting approximately one to four minutes (Hobson et al., 2012).

Dietary nitrates may improve endurance efficiency through nitric oxide–related mechanisms. Omega-3 fatty acids have demonstrated anti-inflammatory effects and may support recovery. Additional evidence supports selected uses of collagen peptides, tart cherry extract, curcumin, probiotics, vitamin D, and magnesium.

Because supplement effectiveness varies substantially among individuals, prescriptive systems should estimate probabilities of response rather than assume universal effectiveness.

Literature Review: Injury Rehabilitation

Injury rehabilitation is influenced by nutrition, sleep, progressive loading, psychological factors, and adherence. Adequate protein intake supports tissue repair and maintenance of lean mass during recovery. Collagen supplementation has shown promise for connective-tissue support in selected populations.

Progressive loading remains a cornerstone of rehabilitation science. Research consistently demonstrates that appropriately dosed loading strategies improve recovery outcomes and reduce reinjury risk. Return-to-play decisions require balancing recovery speed against long-term health and injury prevention.

Evidence aggregation systems may assist clinicians by identifying interventions associated with favorable outcomes in populations that closely resemble the athlete being treated.

Methodology for Evidence Aggregation

This section describes the procedure used to build the prediction models and generate combined performance estimates from the various interventions.

Step 1: Collect Literature Data

We review the scientific literature looking for the effects of different interventions that affect key target variables like aerobic performance, strength or time to recovery from workouts or injury. Independent variables can be thinks like aerobic training, strength training, different supplements like creatine or different dietary interventions like protein intake. Once independent/dependent variable relationships are identified, we extract any quantitative relationships observed in the literature such as number of minutes of aerobic training and time to fatigue or VO_2 max.

Step 2: Assign a Model Family

For each intervention-outcome pair, select a model family.

Available options:

- Linear
- Quadratic
- Exponential
- Categorical

The choice is based on the shape observed in the literature. This assignment is done manually.

Step 3: Convert Literature Buckets into Data Points

Most papers report results as ranges rather than individual observations. Therefore, rather than attempt to assign an exact measurement value for each independent and dependent variable, we use ranges instead. This makes it easier to combine results of different research papers.

To fit a continuous model, we often need to create additional points inside each range.

For each bucket:

1. Identify:
    - Lower intervention value
    - Upper intervention value
    - Lower RR value
    - Upper RR value
2. Generate:
    - Start point
    - End point
    - Midpoint
    - First quartile
    - Third quartile
3. Pair intervention values with corresponding RR values.

This produces a synthetic dataset that approximates the trend reported by the paper.

The purpose is to transform bucketed literature results into a format suitable for curve fitting.

Step 4: Fit Individual Models

Next, we create independent/dependent variable models that allow us to predict a level of the dependent variable from the level of the independent variable. We treat every intervention-outcome combination as an independent modelling problem.

We fit the selected model family to the synthetic dataset.

Examples:

Linear

Fit a degree-1 polynomial regression.

Quadratic

Fit a degree-2 polynomial regression.

Exponential

Fit: y = a * exp(-b*x) + c

using curve fitting.

Categorical

Store category → dependent variable mappings directly.

The output of this step is a prediction model for each intervention-outcome pair.

Step 5: Generate Individual Predictions

For a user's input values:

1. Read the intervention value.
2. Pass it through the corresponding model.
3. Obtain a predicted risk ratio.

Repeat this for every intervention relevant to the target outcome.

The result is a list of predicted performance outcomes.

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Step 6: Sort Predicted Outcomes

Before combining effects:

1. Collect all predicted risk ratios.
2. Sort them in ascending order.

This sorted list becomes the input to the aggregation procedure.

Step 7: Convert Individual Outcomes into Expected Performance Enhancements

For each variable:

1. Start with the current performance level.
2. Calculate current performance level as a baseline of 1.0.
3. Calculate predicted/new performance level assuming new performance level = predicted level.
4. Compute the difference between the two.

Formula:

Effect = Performance(Current Age, predicted performance) - Performance(Current Age, 1.0)

This difference represents the performance enhancement effect of that intervention at the current point in the calculation. The current performance represents where the user is now before any recommended interventions.

Step 8: Sequentially Combine Intervention Effects

Initialize:

Current Performance = Baseline Performance

For each sorted intervention:

1. Calculate performance with intervention.
2. Calculate baseline performance.
3. Compute the difference.
4. Add the difference to Current Performance.

This becomes the final predicted performance.

Discussion

The scientific literature strongly supports the conclusion that athletic performance and recovery are influenced by a complex interaction of nutritional, physiological, behavioral, and environmental variables. Existing research is sufficiently large that manual synthesis is increasingly difficult. Evidence-aggregation systems provide a practical mechanism for translating scientific findings into individualized recommendations.

The framework proposed in this paper combines systematic review methods, evidence weighting, meta-analytic principles, machine learning, and optimization. Such systems have the potential to democratize access to expert-level guidance while continuously incorporating new scientific evidence.

Future research should focus on prospective validation studies, integration of wearable-sensor data, biological-age measures, metabolomics, genomics, and advanced causal-inference techniques. Large-scale implementation studies will be required to determine real-world effectiveness.

If successful, prescriptive evidence-aggregation systems could improve performance outcomes, accelerate recovery, reduce injury risk, and enhance long-term athlete health.

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