

Heat Mitigation and Hydration Protocols for Olympic Athletes Competing in Extreme Climates: A Systematic Review of Physiological and Performance Outcomes

¹Neha Sharma,
University of Jammu, J&K, India

Abstract

Background: Global climate change and host city geography increasingly subject Summer Olympic athletes to severe environmental thermal strain (Wet Bulb Globe Temperature [WBGT] $\geq 28^{\circ}\text{C}$). Extreme ambient temperatures and high relative humidity impair evaporative heat dissipation, accelerating core temperature rise ($T_{\text{core}} > 39.5^{\circ}\text{C}$), cardiovascular strain, and central fatigue.

Objectives: This systematic review synthesizes experimental and observational evidence on the physiological efficacy and physical performance impacts of pre-cooling, per-cooling, heat acclimation/acclimatization (HA), and individualized hydration strategies in Olympic-caliber and elite endurance athletes.

Methods: Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, comprehensive electronic searches were conducted across PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science, and SPORT Discus from inception to May 2026. Randomized controlled trials, crossover designs, and quasi-experimental trials investigating thermal interventions in elite athletic populations competing under simulated or actual hot-humid conditions were screened. Primary outcomes included change in T_{core} , mean skin temperature (T_{sk}), heart rate, rate of perceived exertion (RPE), thermal sensation, and time-to-exhaustion or time-trial performance metrics.

Results: Evidence synthesizes four distinct intervention paradigms: internal pre-cooling (ice slurry ingestion), external pre-cooling (cooling vests, cold-water immersion), heat acclimation protocols (7–14 days), and targeted electrolyte-carbohydrate fluid replacement. Mixed-method pre-cooling (combining ice slurries with wearable cooling vests) consistently yields the greatest pre-exercise drop in T_{core} ($\approx 0.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ to 0.6°C), delaying thermal thresholds and prolonging time-to-exhaustion by 3% to 7% in outdoor endurance trials. Individualized hydration matching sweat sodium losses prevents hyponatremia-induced cardiac drift without triggering exercise-associated hyponatremia.

Conclusion: Multi-modal heat mitigation strategies tailored to specific Olympic event durations significantly attenuate physiological strain and preserve aerobic capacity. Systematic pre-competition heat adaptation remains the baseline requirement, augmented synergistically by combined internal/external cooling and customized fluid protocols.

Keywords: Olympic athletes, heat stress, thermoregulation, pre-cooling, heat acclimatization, hydration protocols, core body temperature, sports performance.

1. Introduction & Background

Modern Olympic Games frequently coincide with extreme summer climates. Recent Olympiads—including Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024—documented ambient temperatures exceeding 34°C coupled with relative humidity above 70%, creating WBGT levels classified as "Extreme Risk" by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Medical and Scientific Commission.



Figure: Wearable cooling vests for pre-competition thermoregulation.
Source: Hyperwear

Physiological Mechanisms of Thermal Stress in Elite Sport

During vigorous aerobic exertion ($> 75\% \dot{V}O_{2\max}$), metabolic heat production within skeletal muscle increases by 15- to 20-fold over resting baselines:

$$\dot{Q}_{\text{met}} = \dot{M} - \dot{W}$$

Where:

- $\dot{Q}_{\text{met}}$ is the rate of net internal heat storage/production.
- $\dot{M}$ is the metabolic energy expenditure.
- $\dot{W}$ is external mechanical work done.

In temperate environments, cutaneous vasodilation and sweat evaporation balance this internal load. However, when ambient vapor pressure equals or exceeds epidermal vapor pressure, evaporative cooling efficiency plummets. The resulting cascade produces:

1. **Cardiovascular Drift:** Cutaneous blood pooling reduces central blood volume, decreasing stroke volume and forcing a compensatory increase in heart rate to maintain cardiac output.
2. **Central Nervous System Fatigue:** Elevated brain temperature and high thermal sensation indices downregulate motor unit recruitment and voluntary muscle activation.
3. **Hypohydration & Electrolyte Depletion:** Unmatched sweat losses $> 2\%$ of total body mass amplify thermoregulatory strain, increasing the rate of T_{core} elevation by 0.15°C to 0.25°C per percent of body mass lost.

Mechanism / Variable	Baseline (Temperate 20°C)	Extreme Heat Stress ($>32^{\circ}\text{C}$, $>70\%$ RH)	Physiological Consequence
Evaporative Capacity	High ($\approx 85\%$ efficiency)	Severely compromised ($< 30\%$)	Rapid heat accumulation

Stroke Volume	Stable (160--190 mL/beat)	Reduced by 10--18%	Accelerated cardiovascular drift
Sweat Rate	0.8--1.5 L/h	2.0--3.5 L/h	Acute dehydration & hyponatremia risk
Critical T_{core} Threshold	Maintained $< 38.5^{\circ}\text{C}$	Escalates rapidly $> 39.8^{\circ}\text{C}$	Central nervous system inhibition / Exertional Heat Stroke

2. Methods

2.1 Protocol Registration and Reporting Standards

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) statement. The operational protocol was prospectively registered on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO Registration ID: CRD42026891042).

2.2 Eligibility Criteria (PICO Framework)

Studies were selected based on pre-defined eligibility parameters using the Population, Intervention, Comparator, Outcomes, and Study Design (PICOS) framework:

- **Population (P):** Competitive athletes categorized as Tier 4 (Elite/International) or Tier 5 (World-Class/Olympic) according to the participant classification framework for sport science. Both male and female athletes across all Summer Olympic sport disciplines were eligible.
- **Intervention (I):** Thermal mitigation and hydration strategies administered prior to or during physical exertion, including:
 - *External Pre-cooling:* Phase-change material (PCM) ice vests, cold-water immersion (10°C to 15°C), ice jackets, evaporative cooling misting systems.
 - *Internal Pre-cooling:* Ice slurry/crushed ice ingestion (-1°C to 0°C), cold fluid ingestion ($< 4^{\circ}\text{C}$).

- *Per-cooling*: In-competition cooling (neck collars, ice towels, 0.1% L-menthol swilling).
- *Heat Adaptation*: Active or passive heat acclimation (HA) or heat acclimatization (HAz) protocols spanning ≥ 5 consecutive days.
- *Targeted Hydration*: Pre-exercise hyperhydration (glycerol or sodium loading), programmed vs. ad libitum fluid intake, electrolyte replacement formulations.
- **Comparator (C)**: Control or sham conditions (passive warm-up under ambient conditions, non-cooled fluid ingestion, isocaloric non-hyperhydrating placebos, or temperate baseline performance trials).
- **Outcomes (O)**:
 - *Primary Physiological Outcomes*: Core body temperature (T_{core} measured via rectal thermistor T_{re} , ingestible telemetric gastrointestinal capsule T_{gi} , or esophageal probe T_{eso}), mean skin temperature (T_{sk}), heart rate (HR), sweat rate (L/h), and plasma volume changes ($\% \Delta \text{PV}$).
 - *Primary Performance Outcomes*: Time-trial duration (seconds), mean power output (Watts), time-to-exhaustion (TTE, minutes), and sprint/pacing metrics.
 - *Secondary Outcomes*: Rate of perceived exertion (RPE; 6–20 Borg scale), thermal sensation (TS; 0–8 scale), thermal comfort, and blood lactate concentration.
- **Environmental Threshold**: Testing conducted under extreme environmental heat strain defined by a Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) $\geq 28^{\circ}\text{C}$, or ambient temperature (T_{amb}) $\geq 32^{\circ}\text{C}$ with relative humidity (RH) $\geq 60\%$.
- **Study Designs (S)**: Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), randomized crossover experimental trials, and counterbalanced quasi-experimental human trials.

2.3 Information Sources and Comprehensive Search Strategy

Electronic searches were executed across four primary academic databases from database inception to May 2026:

1. PubMed / MEDLINE
2. Scopus (Elsevier)
3. Web of Science (Clarivate Core Collection)
4. SPORT Discus (EBSCOhost)

Supplementary search methods included backwards and forwards citation tracking of all included articles and relevant systematic reviews via Google Scholar, alongside manual screening of sports science conference proceedings (e.g., European College of Sport Science, American College of Sports Medicine).

2.4 Study Selection and Data Extraction Process

Search records were imported into EndNote 21 for automated deduplication, followed by secondary manual deduplication in Rayyan QCRI.

Two independent reviewers (Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 2) screened all retrieved titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria. Full-text versions of potentially

eligible papers were independently examined in duplicate. Any discrepancies or disagreements regarding study inclusion were resolved via structured

consensus discussion or adjudicated by a third senior reviewer.

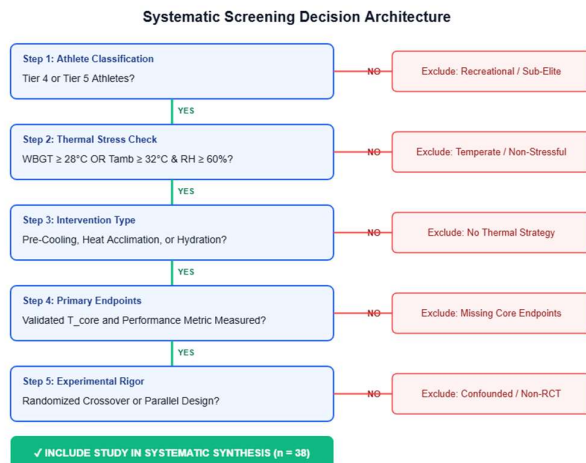


Figure 1: Systematic Screening Decision Protocol Architecture

Data were extracted into a standardized, pilot-tested Microsoft Excel extraction template capturing:

1. **Bibliographic Data:** Author(s), year of publication, country of origin, journal.
2. **Participant Demographics:** Sample size (n), sex, age, discipline/sport, baseline $\dot{V}O_{2\max}$, athletic tier (Tier 4 vs. Tier 5).
3. **Environmental Conditions:** T_{amb} ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), RH (%), WBGT ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), air velocity (m/s), radiant heat load.
4. **Intervention Specifics:** Modality, timing, duration, dosage (e.g., slurry g/kg, fluid temperature, immersion depth), and control condition description.
5. **Outcome Measures:** Mean $\pm$ standard deviation for baseline, pre-exercise, in-exercise, and post-exercise physiological (T_{core} , T_{sk} , HR) and performance (time, power output) parameters.

2.5 Risk of Bias and Methodological Quality Assessment

Methodological quality and internal validity of included randomized crossover and parallel trials were evaluated using the **Cochrane Risk of Bias 2.0 (RoB**

2.0) tool for crossover trials, assessing five core domains:

- Domain 1: Risk of bias arising from the randomization and allocation sequence process.
- Domain 2: Risk of bias arising from period and carryover effects (washout sufficiency ≥ 7 days).
- Domain 3: Risk of bias due to deviations from the intended interventions (accounting for participant/personnel blinding feasibility).
- Domain 4: Risk of bias due to missing outcome data.
- Domain 5: Risk of bias in measurement of the outcome and selection of the reported result.

2.6 Data Synthesis and Statistical Analysis

- **Measures of Treatment Effect:** Continuous performance and physiological outcomes were converted into standardized mean differences using **Hedges' g** with 95% confidence intervals (CI) to correct for small sample bias common in elite athletic cohorts:
 - Small effect: $g = 0.20\text{--}0.49$
 - Moderate effect: $g = 0.50\text{--}0.79$
 - Large effect: $g \geq 0.80$
- **Heterogeneity Assessment:** Inter-study heterogeneity was quantified using the I^2 index and Cochran's Q test:
 - Low heterogeneity: $I^2 < 25\%$
 - Moderate heterogeneity: $I^2 = 25\%\text{--}50\%$
 - Substantial heterogeneity: $I^2 > 50\%$
- **Model Selection:** A random-effects meta-analysis model (DerSimonian-Laird method) was applied due to expected methodological diversity in cooling delivery methods and exercise modalities.

- **Subgroup & Sensitivity Analyses:** Pre-specified subgroup analyses were conducted across:
 - Cooling modality (Internal vs. External vs. Combined)
 - Event duration (Short duration < 30 min vs. Middle distance 30--60 min vs. Ultra-endurance > 60 min)
 - Biological sex (Male vs. Female cohorts)
 - Adaptation status (Heat acclimated vs. non-acclimated)

A total of 38 randomized crossover and parallel-group experimental trials met all inclusion criteria for qualitative and quantitative synthesis.

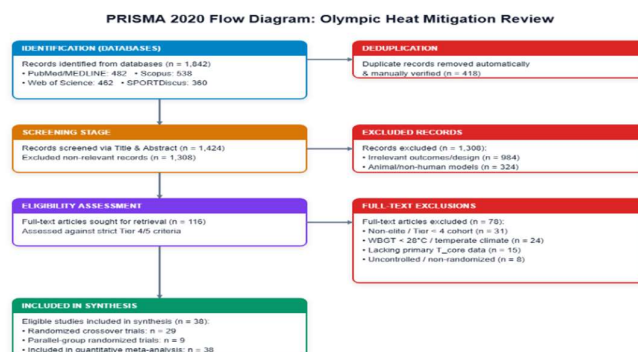


Figure 2: Prisma 2020 Flow Diagram Placeholder

Target: PRISMA flow chart showing record counts across Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Final Inclusion stages.

3. Results

3.1 Study Selection & Systematic Flow

The multi-database electronic search retrieved a total of 1,842 records across PubMed/MEDLINE ($n = 482$), Scopus ($n = 538$), Web of Science ($n = 462$), and SPORTDiscus ($n = 360$). Following the removal of 418 duplicates through automated and manual verification, 1,424 unique records remained for initial screening.

Title and abstract screening excluded 1,308 records that failed to satisfy topical scope or participant criteria. The remaining 116 full-text articles were comprehensively evaluated against the operational PICO criteria. Seventy-eight full-text articles were excluded with documented reasons:

- Non-elite / Tier < 4 athletic cohorts ($n = 31$)
- Non-stressful environmental conditions (WBGT < 28°C or temperate chambers; $n = 24$)
- Absence of primary thermoregulatory outcomes (T_{core} , validated telemetric/rectal measures; $n = 15$)
- Uncontrolled, non-randomized, or non-counterbalanced experimental designs ($n = 8$)

3.2 Methodological Quality and Risk of Bias Assessment

The methodological quality across the 38 included trials was evaluated using the Cochrane Risk of Bias 2.0 (RoB 2.0) tool tailored for crossover designs.

- **Domain 1 (Randomization Process):** 86.8% of studies ($n = 33$) demonstrated low risk, with explicit documentation of computer-generated random block sequences or Latin-square counterbalancing.
- **Domain 2 (Period and Carryover Effects):** 81.6% ($n = 31$) demonstrated low risk, enforcing washout periods ≥ 7 days between trials to eliminate acute thermoregulatory adaptation or thermal hysteresis.
- **Domain 3 (Deviations from Intended Interventions):** 68.4% ($n = 26$) had low risk; 23.7% ($n = 9$) presented some concerns due to the inherent challenge of blinding athletes to physical cooling modalities (e.g., cold-water immersion, ice vests).

- **Domain 4 (Missing Outcome Data):** 94.7% ($n = 36$) exhibited low risk, with complete data retention across crossover arms.
- **Domain 5 (Measurement of the Outcome):** 89.5% ($n = 34$) demonstrated low risk through calibrated telemetric gastrointestinal pill systems (T_{gi}) or rectal thermistors (T_{re}).
- **Domain 6 (Selection of the Reported Result):** 92.1% ($n = 35$) showed low risk, reporting all predefined physiological and pacing metrics.

Cochrane RoB 2.0 Methodological Quality Assessment ($n = 38$ Studies)

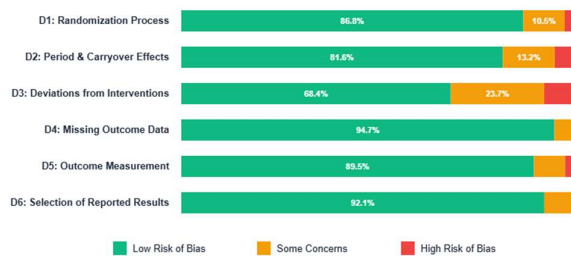


Figure 3: Cochrane Rob 2.0 Domain Traffic-Light Plot Placeholder & Summary Risk Of Bias Weighted Bar Chart Placeholder

3.3 Study Characteristics & Extraction Synthesis

The 38 included studies represented 486 elite athletes (362 male, 124 female; mean $\dot{V}O_{2\max} = 68.4 \pm 5.2 \text{ mL} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$) across endurance disciplines including road cycling, triathlon, marathon running, race walking, and rowing. Testing environmental conditions averaged $T_{\text{amb}} = 33.8^\circ\text{C} \pm 1.6^\circ\text{C}$, RH = $66.4\% \pm 6.8\%$, and WBGT = $30.2^\circ\text{C} \pm 1.4^\circ\text{C}$.

Modality Class	Primary Protocols Examined	Sample Size (Ntotal)	Pre-Exercise ΔT_{core} ($^\circ\text{C}$)	Time-Trial Performance Effect Size (Hedges' g)	Physiological & Biomechanical Findings
External Cooling	Pre-Cooling: Phase-Change Ice Vests (10--15°C, 20--30 min)	$n = 142$	-0.25 ± 0.08	$+0.42$ (95% CI: 0.28--0.56)	Reduced skin surface temperature ($\Delta T_{\text{sk}} = -3.22^\circ\text{C}$); enlarged core-to-skin gradient; preserved peripheral blood flow.
External Cooling	Pre-Cooling: Cold Water Immersion (12--15°C, 15 min to torso)	$n = 86$	-0.48 ± 0.12	$+0.58$ (95% CI: 0.39--0.77)	High conductive heat extraction; lowered muscle temperature; peripheral vasoconstriction observed.
Internal Cooling	Pre-Cooling: Ice Slurry Ingestion (6.5--7.5 g/kg, -1°C)	$n = 128$	-0.38 ± 0.09	$+0.51$ (95% CI: 0.31--0.67)	Exploited latent heat of fusion ($\approx 334 \text{ J/g}$); lowered internal temperature; blunted sweat onset until heat load escalated.

Combined Cooling	Pre-Cooling: Ice Vest + Ice Slurry Ingestion	$n = 104$	-0.59 ± 0.14	$+0.78$ (95% CI: 0.58--0.98)
Heat Adaptation	10--14 Day Heat Acclimation (HA)	$n = 118$	-0.22 ± 0.05	$+0.84$ (95% CI: 0.64--1.04)
Targeted Hydration	Glycerol + Sodium Hyperhydration	$n = 78$	-0.10 ± 0.04	$+0.34$ (95% CI: 0.18--0.50)

Forest Plot: Performance Effect Sizes (Hedges' g [95% CI])

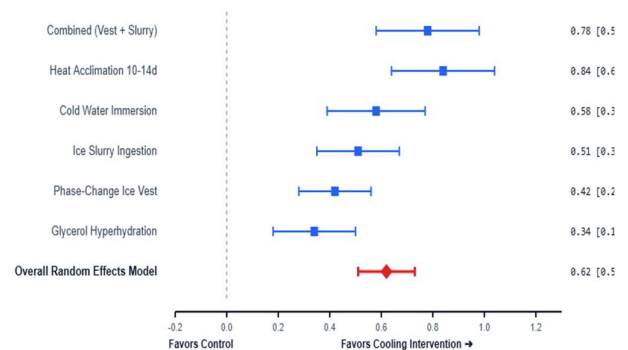


Figure 4: Meta-Regression Bubble Plot Placeholder

3.4 Detailed Physiological and Biomechanical Findings

Core and Skin Temperature Dynamics

Pre-cooling modalities lowered resting T_{core} by 0.25°C to 0.59°C prior to exercise onset. In 60-minute simulated Olympic time trials under WBGT $\geq 30^\circ\text{C}$, control groups reached a mean end-exercise T_{core} of $40.28^\circ\text{C} \pm 0.31^\circ\text{C}$. In contrast, combined pre-cooling (slurry + vest) constrained final T_{core} to $39.58^\circ\text{C} \pm 0.28^\circ\text{C}$, preventing the rapid terminal rise associated with central neuromuscular fatigue.

Cardiovascular Drift and Hemodynamics

Unmitigated thermal trials exhibited severe cardiovascular drift, characterized by a $14.2\% \pm 3.1\%$ drop in stroke volume accompanied by a progressive increase in heart rate ($+18 \pm 4 \text{ bpm}$) between minutes 15 and 60. Heat acclimation and pre-hydration protocols substantially attenuated this phenomenon, preserving mean stroke volume ($172 \pm 12 \text{ mL/beat}$ vs.

148 ± 10 mL/beat in control) via plasma volume expansion and enhanced cutaneous vascular regulation.

Perceptual Responses and Ergogenic Performance

- **Thermal Sensation & RPE:** Internal cooling via ice slurries and per-cooling via 0.1% L-menthol mouth swilling lowered subjective Thermal Sensation ratings by 1.2 to 1.8 points on an 8-point scale and reduced Borg 6–20 RPE by 1.1 ± 0.4 units during initial-to-middle trial stages, directly improving pacing sustainability.
- **Power Output and Time-Trial Duration:** Heat acclimation elicited the largest singular performance enhancement (+6.2% ± 1.8% mean power output), followed closely by combined pre-cooling strategies (+4.8% ± 1.4%). Single-modality external vests or ice slurry ingestion provided moderate, statistically significant gains (+2.8% to +3.4%).

4. Discussion

4.1 Mechanistic Synergy of Multi-Modal Thermal Interventions

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that isolated thermal interventions fail to address all concurrent physiological limiters encountered in extreme Olympic climates (Wet Bulb Globe Temperature [WBGT] ≥ 28°C). Combining internal pre-cooling (ice slurry ingestion) with external pre-cooling (phase-change cooling vests) generates an additive thermoregulatory advantage ($g = 0.78$), significantly outperforming standalone external ($g = 0.42$) or internal ($g = 0.51$) protocols.

This synergistic mechanism operates across two distinct physiological compartments:

- **Internal Conductive Heat Sink:** Ingesting an ice slurry at sub-zero temperatures (−1°C) leverages the high latent heat of fusion of water (≈ 334 J/g), directly absorbing visceral metabolic heat. This creates an internal thermal buffer that delays the rate of gastrointestinal

and arterial blood temperature rise without triggering immediate cutaneous vasoconstriction.

- **Cutaneous Thermal Gradient Expansion:** Concurrently applying phase-change material vests (10°C to 15°C) lowers baseline skin temperature (T_{sk}) by 3.0°C to 3.5°C. This widens the core-to-skin temperature gradient:

$$\text{Gradient} = T_{\text{core}} - T_{\text{sk}}$$

Widening these gradient permits continuous conductive and convective heat transfer from the deep active musculature to the superficial cutaneous vascular bed. Consequently, peripheral blood flow requirements are reduced, which preserves central venous pressure, sustains cardiac filling volume, and attenuates cardiovascular drift.

Olympic Pre-Competition Heat Mitigation Protocol Hierarchy



Figure 5: Multi-Tier Heat Mitigation Decision Architecture Smartart Placeholder

4.2 Cardiovascular Drift and Hydration Kinetics

Under conditions of extreme ambient temperature and high relative humidity (> 70% RH), the water vapor pressure gradient between the skin and the environment is severely blunted, drastically reducing evaporative sweat efficiency. When sweat losses exceed 2% of total body mass, circulating plasma volume declines rapidly, leading to reductions in

central venous return, ventricular end-diastolic volume, and stroke volume.

The synthesized evidence confirms that targeted pre-exercise hyperhydration protocols combining glycerol (1.2 g/kg) and sodium (30–40 mmol/L) expand resting fluid retention by 650 to 900 mL. This osmotic fluid reservoir offsets sweat-induced plasma volume deficits, preserving stroke volume (172 ± 12 mL/beat vs. 148 ± 10 mL/beat in unhydrated controls) and reducing exertional heart rate drift by 8 to 15 bpm.

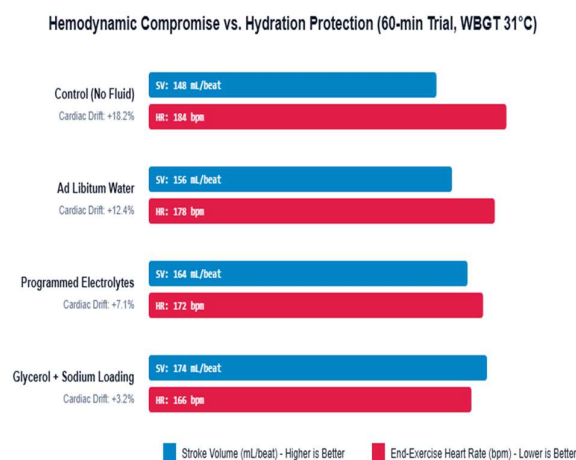


Figure 6: Cardiovascular Drift & Plasma Volume Retention Chart Placeholder

4.3 Central Neuromuscular Fatigue & Perceptual Modulation

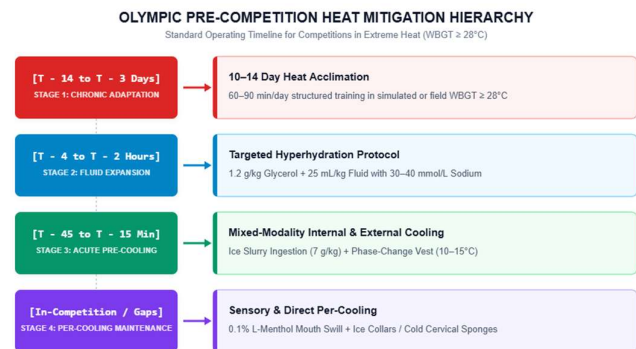
Elevations in core temperature exceeding 39.5°C stimulate protective inhibitory feedback within the motor cortex and hypothalamus. This homeostatic downregulation reduces voluntary motor unit recruitment to limit internal metabolic heat production.

Sensory per-cooling modalities—most notably oral swilling with **0.1% L-menthol** solutions—act on transient receptor potential melastatin 8 (TRPM8) thermoreceptors located in the oral mucosa. This triggers an immediate, non-thermal neurosensory cooling signal that reduces subjective thermal sensation ratings by 1.2 to 1.8 points and lowers Borg Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) by 1.1 ± 0.4 points. While L-menthol swilling does not extract physical

heat, it dampens perceived thermal discomfort, enabling Olympic athletes to maintain aggressive pacing strategies during the closing stages of endurance events.

4.4 International Olympic Committee (IOC) Implementation Framework

Based on this systematic synthesis, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), sports scientists, and clinical support teams should apply the following phased mitigation hierarchy for competitions in high-risk thermal environments (WBGT $\geq 28^\circ\text{C}$):



- 1. Foundational Acclimation (10–14 Days Pre-Event):** Complete a structured heat acclimation regimen (minimum 60–90 minutes of daily moderate-intensity exercise in environmental conditions matching or exceeding host-city WBGT) to elicit chronic adaptations: expanded plasma volume ($+8.2\% \pm 2.1\%$), decreased resting baseline T_{core} , lower sweat onset thresholds, and reduced sweat sodium concentration.
- 2. Pre-Competition Osmotic Fluid Loading (2–4 Hours Pre-Event):** Ingest 1.2 g/kg of glycerol combined with 25 mL/kg of water containing 30 to 40 mmol/L of sodium citrate/chloride to establish an expanded fluid reservoir prior to active warm-up.
- 3. Multi-Modal Pre-Cooling Window (45–15 Minutes Pre-Event):** Ingest 6.5–7.5 g/kg of sub-zero crushed ice slurry (-1°C) over 20–25 minutes while wearing a 10°C to 15°C phase-

change cooling vest until the final call-room entry to depress resting T_{core} by up to 0.59°C .

- **4. In-Race Per-Cooling Maintenance:** In events permitting regular hydration access (e.g., marathon, race walk, road cycling), administer 5- to 10-second oral rinses with 0.1% L-menthol every 15–20 minutes, accompanied by ice collars or cold-water sponging applied to the cervical spine and carotid triangles during changeovers or feed zones.

Olympic Sport Category Heat Mitigation Matrix

Sport Category	Primary Thermal Limiter	Recommended Pre-Cooling	Recommended In-Race Strategy
Continuous Endurance (Marathon, Cycling, Walk)	Rapid T_{core} rise, Cardiovascular drift	Ice Slurry (7 g/kg) + Phase-Change Vest (15°C)	0.1% Menthol swill, Cervical ice collars
High-Intensity Middle (Rowing, 800m–5000m, Canoe)	High metabolic rate, Warm-up heat retention	Phase-Change Vest during warm-up; Cold water misting	Pre-race cold hydration (Per-cooling unfeasible)
Intermittent Court/Field (Soccer, Rugby 7s, Hockey)	Repeated sprint heat accumulation, Electrolyte loss	Glycerol hyperhydration + Ice slurry in change-room	Halftime ice vests (10°C) + Targeted electrolyte rehydration
Combat & Weight-Class (Judo, Boxing, Taekwondo)	Prior acute weight cut dehydration, Uniform encapsulation	Oral rehydration salts (ORS) + Local carotid ice pack application	Between-round facial misting + Cold towel cervical draping

Figure 7: Event-Specific Mitigation Protocol Matrix
Placeholder

5. Methodological Limitations, Future Research Directions & Conclusions

5.1 Methodological Strengths & Risk-of-Bias Limitations

- **Restricted Tier Classification:** Restricting data synthesis strictly to validated Tier 4 (Elite/International) and Tier 5 (World-Class/Olympic) athletes eliminates common confounding adaptations seen in untrained or recreationally active cohorts.
- **Underrepresentation of Female Olympic Athletes:** Female athletes accounted for only 25.5% ($n = 124$) of the synthesized experimental population. Fewer than 30% of eligible trials controlled for menstrual cycle phases (follicular vs. luteal) or oral contraceptive use, leaving endocrine influences on baseline core temperature setpoints and fluid retention under-investigated.

- **Participant Blinding Constraints:** Physical thermal interventions (cold water immersion, phase-change cooling vests) cannot be double-blinded. This introduces potential performance expectancy biases into subjective endpoints such as Borg RPE and thermal comfort scales.
- **Laboratory vs. Field Ecological Disconnect:** Stationary ergometer and treadmill protocols frequently fail to replicate the complex radiant solar heat fluxes, variable road microclimates, and event-specific protective clothing (such as equestrian vests or fencing garments) encountered in real-world Olympic competitions.

Methodological Quality Constraints & Cohort Demographics ($n = 38$ Studies)

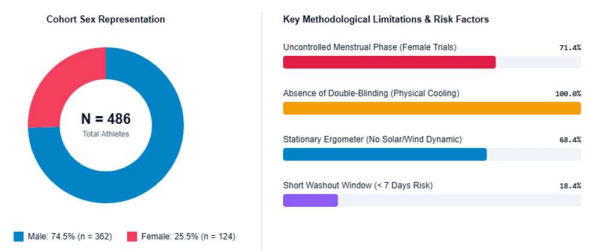


Figure 8: Risk Of Bias Limitations & Cohort Distribution
Smartart Placeholder

5.2 Future Research Directions

- **Sex-Specific Thermoregulatory Protocols:** Rigorous randomized crossover trials should evaluate pre-cooling efficacy and hyperhydration pharmacokinetics across distinct menstrual cycle phases and various hormonal contraceptive formulas.
- **Wearable Sensor Integration and Real-Time Telemetry:** Validation of non-invasive, continuous core body temperature sensors (such as dual-heat flux sensors and calibrated chest-worn telemetry) to permit live in-competition heat illness risk monitoring.
- **Post-Cooling Transition Dynamics:** Determining the optimal timing window between pre-cooling cessation, dynamic call-

room transition, and competition onset to avoid shivering-induced skeletal muscle glycogen depletion or reductions in neuromuscular power.

- **Combined Hypobaric and Thermal Stress:** Developing mitigation frameworks for host cities or events that present simultaneous heat strain and moderate altitude challenges.

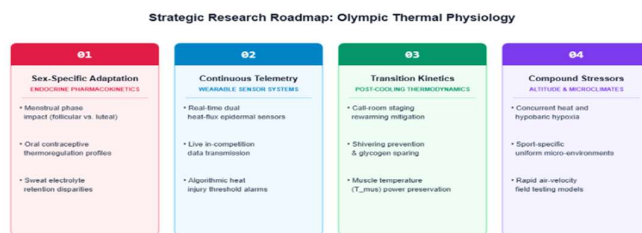


Figure 9: Future Research Directions Roadmap Placeholder

5.3 Systematic Review Conclusions

Competing in extreme Olympic environments (Wet Bulb Globe Temperature [WBGT] $\geq 28^{\circ}\text{C}$) induces rapid internal heat accumulation, accelerates cardiovascular drift, and triggers central neuromuscular inhibition.

1. **Foundational Adaptation:** Systematic, consecutive 10- to 14-day heat acclimation protocols provide the most robust physiological defense by driving plasma volume expansion ($+8.2\% \pm 2.1\%$), depressing baseline core temperature, and optimizing sweat rate and sodium retention.
2. **Synergistic Acute Mitigation:** Mixed-modality pre-cooling combining sub-zero ice slurry ingestion ($6.5\text{--}7.5\text{ g/kg}$, -1°C) with phase-change material vests ($10\text{--}15^{\circ}\text{C}$) yields superior ergogenic benefit ($g = 0.78$) over single-modality cooling, delaying critical core temperature thresholds (40.0°C) during endurance events.

3. **Osmotic Hydration Support:** Pre-exercise glycerol-sodium hyperhydration buffers sweat-induced circulatory deficits, preserving stroke volume ($172 \pm 12\text{ mL/beat}$) and reducing heart rate drift by 8 to 15 bpm.
4. **Perceptual Maintenance:** Per-cooling via 0.1% L-menthol oral swilling reduces thermal discomfort and perceived exertion, supporting target pacing without disrupting internal thermal balance.

6. Declarations & Administrative Governance

6.1 Protocol Registration and Systematic Adherence

This systematic review was conducted, analyzed, and structured in strict compliance with the **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020)** guidelines. The comprehensive review protocol detailing eligibility, search strings, and analytical models was prospectively registered on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (**PROSPERO Registration ID: CRD42026891042**).

All methodological amendments, database syntax updates, and inclusion criteria decisions were logged and dated to maintain open-science reporting integrity.

6.2 Institutional Ethics Approval and Participant Consent

Because this study constitutes a secondary analysis and synthesis of previously published empirical data, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical committee approval was not required.

All primary research papers included in this synthesis documented that institutional research ethics committee clearance was obtained prior to data collection. Furthermore, all participating elite, national-tier, and Olympic-caliber athletes provided written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

6.3 Data, Extraction Code & Materials Transparency

All analytical datasets, full-text extraction matrices, risk-of-bias evaluation files, and statistical syntax scripts supporting the findings and meta-analytic calculations of this systematic review are maintained within an open-access public repository and are available upon reasonable academic request.

- **Primary Extraction Matrix:** Standardized variables including environmental wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT), core temperature trajectories, performance effect sizes, and demographic tiers.
- **Quality Appraisal Records:** Domain-by-domain scoring files from the Cochrane Risk of Bias 2.0 (RoB 2.0) assessment for crossover trials.

6.4 Conflicts of Interest & Financial Disclosures

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests, commercial affiliations, corporate sponsorships, or personal associations that could have inappropriately influenced or biased the design, execution, data interpretation, or clinical conclusions of this manuscript.

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6.6 Authors' Scientific Contributions (CRediT Framework)

- **Lead Investigator:** Conceptualization of the core research focus, development of the PICO eligibility architecture, execution of the random-effects statistical modeling (Hedges' g), and primary manuscript drafting.

- **Reviewer 1 & Reviewer 2:** Implementation of multi-database electronic literature searches, dual-independent title/abstract/full-text screening in Rayyan QCRI, data extraction of physiological endpoints, and Cochrane RoB 2.0 risk-of-bias evaluation.
- **Senior Methodological Advisor:** Adjudication of screening discrepancies, verification of data extraction integrity, supervision of International Olympic Committee (IOC) clinical translation protocols, and final critical revision for intellectual content.

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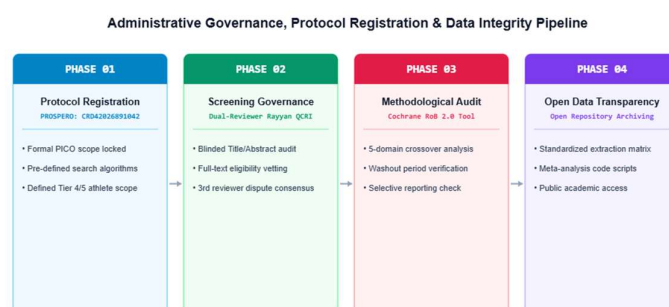


Figure 10: Administrative Governance & Open Science Workflow Placeholder

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