

Walking on the Moon

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Introduction: A specific aspect of interaction on the Moon here approached is how the crew will walk inside and outside the habitat.

Mission Simulation: How high do we jump on the Moon? Should we build architecture with steps or should we support climbing? The hypogravity will lead to vestibular system malfunction, loss of muscular mass, and stiffness of the legs, negatively affecting a person's balance: Yes, we can climb, but we can also easily lose our balance and trip up.



Fig. 1. Apollo astronaut tripping © NASA (Image elaboration Schlacht and Umhof)

To avoid all of this, we need to better understand gait and balance on the Moon. This research will investigate a methodology that focuses on the collection of basic anthropometrical and postural data needed to develop interfaces for the Moon and Mars gravity environments and habitat.

The experiment: Walking on the Moon is an experiment that aims to measure the walking pattern of astronauts during EVA (Extra vehicular activity) and IVA (Intra-Vehicular Activity). It is developed with the support of German Aerospace Center (DLR), International Lunar Exploration Working Group (ILEWG), Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI) and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT).

On the Moon, it is very important to avoid tripping by increasing one's balance in order to assure the safety required in those extreme contexts. Balance is a factor that depends on many variables, such as: visual field, sensorimotor system, vestibular system. These variables are all affected by the different environmental constraints of Moon and Mars environments [1, 2, 3, 4].

Methods: The Walking on the Moon experiment will address the walking pattern and balance by

measuring the biomechanical variables of the gait that impact an astronaut's balance during Moon and Mars missions.

To simulate the same conditions of a Moon/Mars mission, we need: partial gravity achieved with a vertical treadmill, deconditioning achieved with bedrest, and artificial gravity (AG) as physiological countermeasures.

Subjects who will undergo three different conditions will be compared (parallel-group design): sixty days of -6° head down tilt bedrest only (Control group), 60-day head down tilt with continuous AG, and with intermittent AG. The data collected will be kinematographic and biomechanical data during walking and running in simulated hypogravity with a vertical treadmill.

On the vertical treadmill, the subjects will be suspended by a belt system to simulate different degrees of hypogravity. An accelerometer will measure speed, step extent, direction of movement, variation of altitude, typology of walk, and balance. The recording of video data will support the research of the line of sight to derive the vestibular plane direction.

The data will be collected three times: at the baseline, a few days after 60d of bedrest, and after recovery. Finally with a debriefing the all crew together will discuss problem and solution, this will produce qualitative data for the improvement of walk pattern and balance.

Additional research: Another methodology that will be analyzed consists of the utilization of the swimming pool of the Neutral Buoyancy Facility at the European Astronaut Centre (ESA). By using a combination of distributed mechanical loads on different parts of a subject's body (and, possibly, floaters to optimize the application point of the resultant force), a realistic reduced gravity effect can be obtained to simulate and analyze Moon and Mars walking pattern.

