

Article

# Enhancing well-being and quality of life: the importance of physiotherapy and physical activity for the elderly in nursing home facilities

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**Abstract:** This article explores the importance of physiotherapy and physical activity for the elderly in nursing home. They play crucial roles in enhancing the well-being and quality of life for residents in nursing homes. Physiotherapy, a specialized form of therapy focused on improving movement and function, has been proven to be highly beneficial for elderly individuals. It helps enhance mobility, reduce pain, and prevent common age-related health issues, such as falls. And the physical activity has been widely recognized as an effective means of promoting overall health and well-being in the elderly population.

**Keywords:** nursing home, elderly population, physiotherapy, physical activity;

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## INTRODUCTION

With the global population aging at an unprecedented rate, nursing home facilities have become essential for providing care and support to the elderly. The elderly population often faces various health challenges, including reduced mobility, chronic pain, and increased risk of falls and injuries. In this context, physiotherapy and physical activity play crucial roles in enhancing the well-being and quality of life for residents in nursing homes.

The importance of physiotherapy and physical activity for the elderly in nursing home facilities cannot be overstated. Physiotherapy, a specialized form of therapy focused on improving movement and function, has been proven to be highly beneficial for elderly individuals. It helps enhance mobility, reduce pain, and prevent common age-related health issues, such as falls. Additionally, physical activity has been widely recognized as an effective means of promoting overall health and well-being in the elderly population. Engaging in regular exercise can improve cardiovascular health, maintain muscle strength and flexibility, and even enhance cognitive function.

### PHYSIOTHERAPY FOR THE ELDERLY IN NURSING HOMES

Physiotherapy plays a pivotal role in improving the health and well-being of elderly individuals residing in nursing home facilities. Defined as a specialized form of therapy focused on enhancing movement and function, physiotherapy offers numerous benefits to the elderly population, including improved mobility, pain reduction, and fall prevention (Baert et al., 2015). Also known as physical therapy, physiotherapy encompasses a range of interventions aimed at restoring and maintaining physical function and quality of life. In the context of nursing homes, physiotherapy focuses on addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by elderly residents. These needs often include age-related decline in mobility, strength, and balance, as well as specific conditions such as osteoarthritis, stroke, and dementia (Leemrijse et al., 2007; Brett & Ilhan, 2022).

Physiotherapy interventions in nursing homes encompass a variety of techniques and approaches including therapeutic exercises, manual therapy, electrotherapy, gait and balance training, and education on proper body mechanics and ergonomics (Brett & Ilhan, 2022). By tailoring treatment plans to individual needs, physiotherapists

strive to enhance functional abilities, alleviate pain, and promote independence among elderly residents. Research consistently demonstrates the wide-ranging benefits of physiotherapy for the elderly population in nursing homes. Firstly, physiotherapy interventions are instrumental in improving mobility and functional abilities. Through targeted exercises and therapeutic techniques, physiotherapists can enhance muscle strength, joint flexibility, and coordination, enabling residents to perform daily activities with greater ease and independence (Kowalska et al., 2019). Secondly, physiotherapy contributes to the reduction of pain and discomfort experienced by elderly individuals. Techniques such as manual therapy, heat or cold therapy, and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) can effectively alleviate pain associated with musculoskeletal conditions, arthritic joints, or post-surgical recovery (Kowalska et al., 2019). In addition, physiotherapy interventions play a vital role in fall prevention among the elderly in nursing homes. Physiotherapists can assess balance, identify fall risk factors, and design individualized exercise programs that focus on improving balance, coordination, and proprioception. By addressing these factors, physiotherapy helps minimize the incidence of falls and associated injuries, thus enhancing the safety and well-being of residents (Brett & Ilhan, 2022).

Physiotherapists are integral members of the healthcare team in nursing home facilities. Their expertise in assessing, diagnosing, and treating movement and functional impairments is crucial for addressing the specific needs of elderly residents. Physiotherapists conduct comprehensive assessments to evaluate the physical abilities, mobility, and functional limitations of elderly residents. Based on these assessments, they develop personalized treatment plans tailored to each individual's needs, goals, and health conditions (Leemrijse et al., 2007). Then, they utilize evidence-based exercise programs and rehabilitation techniques to improve mobility, strength, and balance. These may include resistance training, stretching exercises, aerobic conditioning, and specialized techniques such as hydrotherapy or tai chi. By incorporating these interventions into daily routines, physiotherapists help residents achieve optimal physical functioning (Brett & Ilhan, 2022; Spanakis et al., 2022). By regularly monitoring the progress of residents and adjusting treatment plans accordingly, they can assess the effectiveness of interventions, modify exercise regimens, and provide ongoing support and guidance to promote consistent engagement in therapy (Högstedt, 2022). By recognizing the significance of physiotherapy in

nursing home facilities and ensuring access to skilled physiotherapists, nursing home facilities can effectively support the physical functioning and overall quality of life for elderly residents.

### **IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR THE ELDERLY IN NURSING HOMES**

Physical activity plays a crucial role in promoting the health and well-being of elderly individuals residing in nursing home facilities. Engaging in regular physical activity has been associated with a range of benefits, including improved mental well-being, enhanced physical function, and better quality of life.

Physical activity has been shown to have a positive effect on mental health outcomes. It can reduce depressive symptoms, enhance mood, and improve overall psychological well-being among nursing home residents (Lok et al., 2017). Engaging in physical activity provides opportunities for social interaction, promotes a sense of purpose, and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Moreover, physical activity contributes to the maintenance of physical function and independence in older adults. Regular exercise helps improve cardiovascular health, maintain muscle strength and flexibility, and enhance overall physical performance (de Souto Barreto et al., 2016). By engaging in activities such as resistance training, balance exercises, and aerobic conditioning, elderly individuals can reduce the risk of functional decline and maintain their ability to perform daily activities. Furthermore, physical activity has a positive impact on overall quality of life. It can increase self-esteem, promote a sense of accomplishment, and improve overall satisfaction with life (Landi et al., 2004). Participating in meaningful physical activities that align with personal interests and abilities can enhance the overall sense of well-being among nursing home residents.

Despite the known benefits of physical activity, several barriers exist that hinder participation among elderly individuals in nursing homes. Environmental constraints, such as limited access to safe outdoor spaces or lack of suitable exercise equipment, can impede engagement in physical activity (Huang et al., 2020). Additionally, health conditions and physical limitations may pose challenges for some residents, making it difficult for them to initiate or maintain physical activity (Weeks et al., 2008). Lastly, social and psychological factors, such as lack of motivation, fear of falling, or lack of social support, can act as barriers to participation (Huang et al., 2020).

To overcome barriers and promote physical activity among elderly residents in nursing homes, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, tailoring exercise programs to individual needs and abilities is essential. Physiotherapists and activity coordinators can assess residents' physical capabilities and preferences and design personalized exercise plans that are safe, enjoyable, and appropriate for their unique circumstances (de Souto Barreto et al., 2016). Incorporating group activities and social engagement can enhance motivation and foster a sense of community among residents. Group exercise classes, walking clubs, and recreational activities that promote social interaction can make physical activity more enjoyable and increase adherence (Huang et al., 2020). Finally, educating staff and caregivers on the importance of physical activity and providing them with the necessary training and resources can create a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates regular physical activity among residents (de Souto Barreto et al., 2016). By recognizing the wide-ranging benefits of physical activity and addressing barriers to participation, nursing home facilities can create an environment that promotes and supports regular physical activity, thereby enhancing the lives of their residents.

### **CASE STUDIES AND EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH**

In order to highlight the effectiveness of physiotherapy and physical activity programs for the elderly in nursing homes, a selection of case studies and evidence-based research studies will be presented below in order to provide valuable insights into the positive outcomes achieved through these interventions and support the importance of their implementation.

Henskens et al. (2018) examined the impact of a physical activity program on nursing home residents with dementia and found that physical activity interventions led to improvements in cognitive function, physical performance, and overall quality of life for participants. In addition to being beneficial to patients with dementia which is not uncommon amongst the elderly in nursing homes, Lok et al. (2017) found that benefits can also extend to depression, another common condition found in the elderly. This randomized controlled trial investigated the effects of a physical activity intervention on depressive symptoms and quality of life in elderly nursing home residents. The study found that engaging in physical activity led to a

significant reduction in depressive symptoms and improvements in quality of life among participants. Moreover, a taskforce report (de Souto Barreto et al., 2016) provided evidence-based recommendations for promoting physical activity and exercise among older adults in long-term care facilities. The report highlighted the benefits of physical activity in improving physical function, cognitive function, and psychosocial well-being among nursing home residents. According to the review, physical activity interventions should be tailored to the individual's abilities, preferences, and specific health conditions. Alternative forms of physical activity, such as chair exercises, aquatic therapy, or tai chi, can be implemented to accommodate individual needs and provide opportunities for engagement and movement. Customizing exercise programs ensures that they are safe, effective, and enjoyable for each resident as well as encompassing a combination of aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility exercises to target different aspects of physical fitness. Residents should engage in exercise sessions at least three to five times per week, with each session lasting around 30 minutes or more as consistency is key to achieving optimal health benefits. Safety considerations should be incorporated into physical activity programs and the programs should create opportunities for social interaction and engagement among residents. Group exercises, walking clubs, or team-based activities foster a sense of community and motivation, making physical activity more enjoyable and sustainable.

Adams & Tyson (2000) focused on an elderly individual in a nursing home who experienced difficulty getting up from the floor. Through a targeted physiotherapy intervention, the individual was able to regain the ability to independently rise from the floor, demonstrating the effectiveness of physiotherapy in improving functional abilities. This case study research can be applied to others, for various daily tasks which can be regained via physiotherapy. Other studies support these findings with results which show that physiotherapy can significantly improve motor function, cognitive function, and mobility (Manckoundia et al., 2014; Domiciano et al., 2016) These case studies and research findings provide compelling evidence of the positive effects of physiotherapy and physical activity programs for elderly residents in nursing homes.

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the importance of physiotherapy and physical activity for the elderly in nursing home

facilities is undeniable. Physiotherapy interventions, guided by skilled professionals, have been shown to improve mobility, reduce pain, and prevent falls among elderly residents. Likewise, engaging in regular physical activity offers a myriad of benefits, including enhanced mental well-being, improved physical function, and a better quality of life. By recognizing the value of these interventions and implementing evidence-based recommendations, nursing homes can prioritize the health and well-being of their elderly residents. Promoting physiotherapy and physical activity programs that are tailored to individual needs, ensuring safety measures, fostering social interaction, and educating staff and caregivers are key components of creating an environment that supports and enhances the overall health and vitality of the elderly population in nursing home settings. By prioritizing physiotherapy and physical activity, we can empower older adults to age with dignity, independence, and an improved quality of life.

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