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Healthy aging and maintaining functional independence: the role of physiotherapy in promoting quality of life.

Healthy aging and maintenance of functional independence: the role of physical therapy in promoting quality of life

Healthy aging and maintenance of functional independence: the role of physiotherapy in promoting quality of life

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SUMMARY

Population aging represents a significant challenge for healthcare systems due to the physiological, functional, and psychosocial changes that can compromise the autonomy and quality of life of the elderly population. In this context, physiotherapy stands out as a fundamental strategy for promoting healthy aging and maintaining functional independence. This study aimed to analyze the scientific literature published between 2022 and 2026 regarding the benefits of regular physiotherapy for maintaining the functional independence of elderly people. This is a qualitative bibliographic research, developed through a literature review in the LILACS and SciELO databases, accessed through the Virtual Health Library (VHL). Full articles published in Portuguese and English related to the proposed theme were included. The analyzed studies demonstrated that physiotherapy contributes to muscle strengthening, improved balance, mobility and motor coordination, fall prevention, and maintenance of functional capacity. In addition to the physical benefits, a positive impact was observed on the autonomy, self-esteem, social participation, and quality of life of the elderly. In conclusion, physiotherapy is an important tool for promoting health, preventing disabilities, and preserving functional independence, thus favoring a more active and healthy aging process with a better quality of life.

Keywords: Aging; Physiotherapy; Functional Independence; Quality of Life.

ABSTRACT

Population aging represents a major challenge for healthcare systems due to the physiological, functional, and psychosocial changes that may compromise older adults' autonomy and quality of life.
In this context, physical therapy plays a fundamental role in promoting healthy aging and maintaining

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functional independence. This study aimed to analyze the scientific literature published between 2022 and 2026 regarding the benefits of regular physical therapy for maintaining functional independence in older adults. This qualitative bibliographic study was conducted through a literature review using the LILACS and SciELO databases accessed via the Virtual Health Library (VHL). Full-text articles published in Portuguese and English and related to the proposed topic were included. The analyzed studies demonstrated that physical therapy significantly contributes to muscle strengthening, improved balance, mobility, motor coordination, fall prevention, and maintenance of functional capacity. In addition to physical benefits, positive effects were observed on autonomy, self-esteem, social participation, and quality of life among older adults. It is concluded that physical therapy is an important tool for health promotion, disability prevention, and preservation of functional independence, contributing to healthier, more active aging and improved quality of life.

Keywords: Aging; Physical Therapy; Functional Independence; Quality of Life.

1 INTRODUCTION

Aging is a continuous biological process inherent to human development. Although
Although it begins at conception and continues through all stages of life, it is in old age that its...
The symptoms become more evident, involving physiological, functional, and psychological changes.
and social factors that can compromise the autonomy and quality of life of individuals (Galvão; Ala;
(Santos, 2026; Reis et al., 2022). In this context, aging ceases to represent only the
The passage of time becomes a significant challenge for the promotion of health and well-being.
functional independence of the elderly population.
The changes resulting from aging affect functional capacity, in relation to
reduction in muscle strength, postural balance, and mobility, factors that increase the
Physiological vulnerability, risk of falls, and dependence for performing activities of daily living.
daily (Xu et al., 2023). Furthermore, physical inactivity is a significant aggravating factor for this.
process, being associated with increased functional disability, reduced quality of life and
to the increased risk of premature morbidity and mortality (Pereira et al., 2025).
Given this scenario, physiotherapy stands out as an important strategy for promoting...
Healthy aging. Their work includes interventions aimed at reducing pain,
Restoration of joint mobility, muscle strengthening, improved balance, re-education of
gait and prevention of functional complications, promoting the maintenance of independence and
Functional capacity of the elderly. Scientific evidence demonstrates that adopting a lifestyle of
An active lifestyle, combined with physiotherapy follow-up, helps to minimize the effects.
counteracting the deleterious effects of aging, promoting greater autonomy, self-confidence, and reducing the fear of
falls and improved quality of life (Pires et al., 2026).
From this perspective, the body should be understood as a dynamic system, capable of responding
motor and functional stimuli throughout life. The preservation of locomotor abilities and

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Postural factors represent one of the main determinants of functional independence in old age.
reinforcing the importance of preventive and rehabilitative physiotherapy interventions. Thus, it becomes...
if necessary to broaden the scientific understanding regarding the contribution of physiotherapy to
maintaining the functionality of the elderly, considering the growth of the aging population and the
growing demand for strategies that promote active aging and a better quality of life.
life.

Given this context, the general objective of this study is to analyze the scientific literature.
published in the last five years about the benefits of regular physiotherapy for maintaining
Functional independence of elderly people.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as a bibliographic research, of a qualitative nature.
developed through a literature review. The bibliographic survey was carried out in
Virtual Health Library (VHL), encompassing scientific articles indexed in databases.
LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences) and SciELO (Scientific Journal of Economics and Statistics)
(Electronic Library Online). For the search strategy, the following descriptors were used.
"Aging", "Physiotherapy", "Elderly", "Functional Independence" and "Quality of Life"
combined with each other using the Boolean operator AND, in order to expand the specificity of
results and retrieve studies related to the research objective.
The inclusion criteria were established as follows: complete scientific articles, available in
electronic format, published between 2022 and 2026, in Portuguese and English, that addressed the
The role of physiotherapy in promoting functional independence, quality of life, and...
Healthy aging of the elderly population. As exclusion criteria, articles were considered
duplicates in the databases consulted, abstracts, editorials, letters to the editor, incomplete works and
studies that did not have a direct relationship with the proposed theme.
After applying the eligibility criteria, the selected studies were submitted for reading.
exploratory, followed by analytical reading and critical interpretation. The information extracted was
organized according to the research objectives, which allowed for the identification of the main ones.
The benefits of physiotherapy in maintaining the functional independence of the elderly. Finally, the findings
They were synthesized and discussed in light of the selected scientific literature.

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3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aging is associated with progressive physiological changes that affect the ability
Functional function and quality of life for the elderly population. Quality of life is a concept
multidimensional, involving physical, psychological, social and environmental conditions, such as housing,
food, access to health services, leisure, culture, and autonomy to carry out activities.
daily activities. In this context, the loss of functional independence resulting from motor limitations.
This is one of the main factors associated with a reduction in quality of life in old age.
Among the most relevant physiological changes of aging, the gradual reduction of... stands out.
motor units, structures responsible for controlling the force, coordination, and precision of
muscle contraction. According to Garcia, Brito and Valduga (2025), this loss occurs in a way
progressive throughout life, becoming more pronounced after the seventh decade. As a consequence,
A decrease in muscle strength, postural stability, and functional capacity is observed.
However, the authors emphasize that the regular practice of physical exercise and programs
Physiotherapists can minimize this degenerative process, preserving performance.
neuromuscular for a longer period.
In this scenario, physiotherapy plays an essential role in both prevention and treatment.
Rehabilitation of functional limitations associated with aging. Interventions
Physiotherapeutic treatments are based on structured programs of muscle strengthening and training.
Balance, mobility, motor coordination, and functional rehabilitation, providing benefits.
significant in the independence of the elderly in activities such as walking, getting up from a chair and
climbing stairs (Marialva; Silva, 2026).
In addition to in-person interventions, new technologies are expanding therapeutic possibilities.
According to Policeno Xavier et al. (2025), telerehabilitation has become established as a strategy.
efficient in expanding access to physiotherapy services for the elderly population, promoting
continuity of treatment, improving adherence to exercise programs and ensuring safety.
during clinical follow-up. The authors also demonstrate that physiotherapy programs
Structured exercises promote significant improvements in balance, postural control, and coordination.
motor skills, functionality, and psychological well-being of older adults.
Exercise prescriptions for older adults should take into account their clinical, functional, and...
Each individual's cardiovascular system has its own specific characteristics, requiring evaluation and monitoring by a healthcare professional.
qualified professionals. Barbosa, Chagas and Fontes (2025) emphasize that sedentary elderly people
They require a gradual increase in the intensity of the exercises, taking their limitations into account.
physiological and reducing the risk of complications. Therefore, individualizing treatment is key.

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This constitutes one of the fundamental principles of physiotherapy practice.

Another relevant aspect concerns the benefits of exercise for the musculoskeletal system.

Hartley et al. (2022) highlight that physiotherapy programs with resistance exercises favor

increasing or preserving bone mass, reducing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.

related to aging. These effects are associated with the mechanical stimulation produced by

Muscle tissue lies over bone tissue, contributing to the maintenance of functionality and mobility.

Functional independence is considered one of the main indicators of healthy aging.

According to Ribeiro et al. (2022), it corresponds to the elderly person's ability to perform, without assistance...

third parties, the basic and instrumental activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing,

Moving around, using means of communication, and performing household tasks. The preservation of this

capacity is related to maintaining mobility, balance, muscle strength and

motor coordination.

In this context, the regular practice of physical exercise represents an important strategy for...

Promoting health and preventing functional disabilities associated with aging.

However, the effects obtained vary according to factors such as clinical conditions and predisposition.

Genetics, lifestyle, and the regularity of interventions. According to Araujo-Gomes et al.

(2023), aerobic, resistance, controlled impact and muscle strengthening exercises, when

Performed at appropriate intensity and under professional supervision, they contribute to the maintenance of

Functional independence of the elderly.

Thus, it can be seen that physiotherapy goes beyond treating existing limitations.

also working in the prevention of disabilities, in the promotion of autonomy and in the improvement of

Quality of life. By promoting physical, psychological, and social gains, physiotherapy programs...

They allow for greater participation in daily activities, reduce the risk of falls, and...

preserving functional independence, consolidating itself as a fundamental strategy for a

active aging.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, studies published between 2022 were analyzed.

and 2026 that investigated the contribution of physiotherapy to maintaining functional independence

and the quality of life of the elderly population. In general, a consensus was observed among the authors.

Regarding the benefits of physiotherapy intervention, such as muscle strengthening, improvement of

Balance, fall prevention, increased functional autonomy, and promotion of healthy aging.

healthy. Table 1 presents a summary of the main studies included in this review.

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Table 1 – Summary of the analyzed studies on physiotherapy and functional independence in the elderly.

Author/Year	Objective	Main results : Functional independence factors: Evidence shows	Contribution to the study
Ribeiro et al. (2022)	Evaluate related functional capacity	that functionality is related to the ability to perform activities of daily life.	as activities of healthy aging.
musculoskeletal disorders (Hartley et al., 2022).	Developing guidelines for resistance exercises with osteoporosis	Patients reduce the risk of fractures and undergo physiotherapy. They improve mobility.	benefits of physiotherapy in preserving bone mass,
Xu et (2023)	Evaluating the effects of the Tai Chi focuses on postural Balance and quality of life. of life	significant improvement balance and...	reinforces the importance of the al. therapeutic exercises in fall prevention.
according to Araujo et al., investigate the effects of physical activity on the influence of resistance training. The study by Gomes et al. highlights the influence of physical activity on the...	functional autonomy	Aerobic and resistance exercises, autonomy and improve (2023) quality of life.	functional independence.
Barbosa, Chagas and Sources (2025)	impact of strength training	Progressive training: Reviewing the highlights the need for individualized strength training and sedentary older adults. life.	quality of life in exercise prescription.
Garcia, Brito and motor	Assess related Valduga This performance of compromising strength (2025) elderly	Aging reduces aspects of motor units. explains changes in physiological functions that justify physiotherapy intervention. to the balance.	and and
Evaluating (2025)	the effectiveness of telerehabilitation in autonomy of the elderly	Physiotherapy: and the demonstrates the expansion of autonomy and adherence to treatment.	therapeutic strategies. Xavier et al.
Pereira et al.	Analyzing the impacts of physical inactivity is physical activity in the associated increase (2025) quality of life	functional disability.	It highlights sedentary lifestyle and as a risk factor.
Marialva and Silva (2026)	Investigating the impacts of physiotherapy programs confirms the improving strength, balance, and functionality, as well as the to perform activities. functional	daily.	effectiveness of physiotherapy in independence and ability of elderly individuals
al. (2026)	Evaluating home exercises: and physiotherapy for greater independence through continuous supervised	Improvement in mobility, pain reduction, functional.	and follow-up were observed. Pires et physiotherapy.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

The studies analyzed demonstrate that physiotherapy plays a key role in

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Preservation of the functional capacity of the elderly. Among the most frequently reported benefits are: Muscle strengthening, improved postural balance, increased mobility, and reduction of risk of falls, decreased pain, and greater autonomy in performing activities of daily living. daily. Furthermore, several authors highlight that structured exercise programs Physiotherapeutic treatments produce positive impacts not only on physical health, but also on other aspects. emotional and social factors, which are reflected in quality of life.

The findings of this review reveal a high degree of convergence among the studies analyzed. Ribeiro et al. al. (2022) state that functional independence is one of the main indicators of Healthy aging is determined by the elderly person's ability to perform basic activities. and instrumental skills for daily life without the assistance of others. This perspective is corroborated by Marialva and Silva (2026), who observed significant improvements in functionality after interventions. Physiotherapeutic techniques focused on muscle strengthening, balance training, and mobility. Similarly, Garcia, Brito and Valduga (2025) explain that aging causes a Progressive reduction of motor units, compromising strength, coordination, and stability. postural. This physiological mechanism helps to understand the results found by Xu et al. (2023), whose systematic review demonstrated that therapeutic exercise programs promote Improved balance and quality of life, reducing factors associated with falls, one of the main causes of disability among the elderly.

Another point of consensus concerns the benefits of supervised physical exercise. Araujo-Gomes et al. (2023) demonstrate that aerobic and resistance exercises promote significant gains. in functional autonomy. In agreement, Barbosa, Chagas and Fontes (2025) argue that the Strength training should be performed progressively and in an individualized manner, respecting the... clinical conditions of the elderly. Thus, although both recognize the benefits of regular exercise exercises, Barbosa, Chagas and Fontes (2025) emphasize that the safety of the intervention depends on an appropriate physiotherapy prescription.

The results also show progress in strategies for assisting the elderly. Policeno Xavier et al. (2025) highlight telerehabilitation as an efficient alternative to expand access to services. physiotherapy, promoting greater adherence to treatment and continuity of interventions. These The findings broaden the traditional view of in-person physiotherapy care and indicate that... Technological resources can contribute to the care of elderly people with mobility limitations. With regard to the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders, Hartley et al. (2022) demonstrate Resistance exercises help maintain bone mass and prevent osteoporosis.

These results complement the findings of Pires et al. (2026), who verified an improvement in Mobility, pain reduction, and increased functional independence after physiotherapy programs.

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supervised and home-based exercises. Although they address distinct populations, both studies
They converge in demonstrating that physiotherapy interventions reduce functional limitations and
They promote active aging.

On the other hand, Pereira et al. (2025) draw attention to the negative impact of physical inactivity, linking sedentary lifestyle to increased functional disability, morbidity, and worsening of quality of life. These results reinforce the evidence presented by the other authors, demonstrating that the absence of physical activity accelerates the physiological effects of aging, While physiotherapy and therapeutic exercises act as important preventive strategies.

In general, the studies analyzed did not present significant divergences regarding benefits of physiotherapy for the elderly population. The differences observed are concentrated in therapeutic protocols employed, the intensity of the exercises, and the intervention modalities, without compromising the consensus that physiotherapy represents an effective tool for preserving the functional independence, reducing disabilities and promoting a better quality of life during the aging process

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study aimed to analyze, through a review of the scientific literature, the Benefits of regular physiotherapy for maintaining the functional independence of elderly people. Based on the analysis of the selected studies, a consensus was found among the authors regarding... The importance of physiotherapy as a strategy for promoting healthy aging. contributing to the preservation of functional capacity, the prevention of disabilities and improvement of quality of life.

The results demonstrated that physiotherapy interventions based on exercises of muscle strengthening, balance training, mobility, motor coordination and re-education Functional exercises promote significant gains in the autonomy of older adults, reducing the risk of falls. improving the performance of activities of daily living and promoting the maintenance of independence. functional for longer. In addition to the physical benefits, it has been observed that the regular practice of Exercise contributes to psychological well-being, strengthens self-esteem, and expands... social participation, reducing the isolation associated with aging.

Another aspect highlighted in the literature refers to the preventive role of physiotherapy, which goes beyond... Rehabilitation of existing limitations, working to promote health and prevent further changes. functional changes resulting from the aging process. In this sense, strategies such as programs Supervised exercise and telerehabilitation show promise as alternatives to expand

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Access to physiotherapy care for the elderly population.

It can therefore be concluded that physiotherapy constitutes an important instrument for the promotion of autonomy, functional independence, and quality of life for the elderly, contributing to a More participatory aging. It is recommended that future research develop studies clinical and longitudinal studies capable of evaluating the effects of different physiotherapy protocols on the functionality and quality of life of the elderly population, strengthening the scientific evidence. regarding this topic.

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