

Interventions for Behaviour Change Aimed at Promoting Health in Older Adults – An Evidence Map

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Main message and conclusions

A number of systematic reviews evaluating the effects of interventions to increase physical activity in older adults have been published in recent years, as have reviews on interventions for self-care in age-related health conditions. Fewer reviews have focused on other lifestyle behaviours.

Behaviour change interventions are often complex, comprising multiple components. A key challenge in synthesising studies of such interventions is providing enough detail to compare them effectively. Few reviews have used reporting tools like TIDieR (Template for Intervention Description and Replication) [69] to guide data extraction. Incorporating such tools could improve transparency and synthesis quality.

Only a minority of reviews applied a theoretical model of behaviour change. More consistent use of these models could clarify which intervention components influence behaviour and support shared knowledge development.

Aim

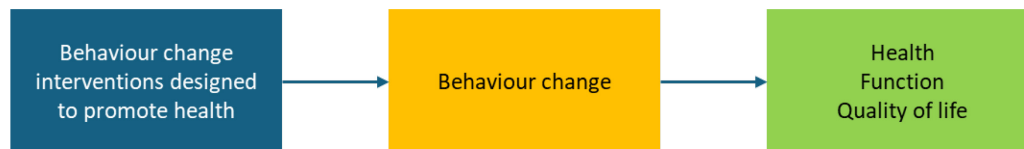
To map and present the current state of knowledge regarding:

- systematically compiled research on interventions for behaviour change aimed at promoting health in older adults (Figure 1), and
- the evidence concerning the effects of these interventions on behavioural and health outcomes, and the evidence gaps identified in the available research.

Background

With life expectancy continuing to rise, a growing proportion of the population is living well into old age. Although many older adults remain healthy and independent, the risk of illness and functional decline increases with age. Behaviour change interventions that promote healthy lifestyles in later life have the potential to enhance quality of life, delay the onset of disease, and reduce the need for care. These benefits make such interventions a key area for research and policy development.

Figure 1 The mapped interventions are offered to promote health. The effect on health is achieved through behaviour change.



Methods

We searched for, and included systematic reviews published between 2020 and October 2024 that evaluated behaviour change interventions and examined their effects on behaviour and/or health (including function and quality of life). The interventions also had to have been evaluated for older adults over the age of 65 and be feasible to offer within the framework of Swedish primary care.

The reliability of the reviews was assessed, and the risk that the results presented may have been affected by bias was rated as low, moderate, or high. Results reflecting the review authors' conclusions about the effects of the interventions are reported for the subset of reviews assessed as having low or moderate risk of bias. Results describing the content of the interventions are reported for all included reviews.

Inclusion criteria

- *Population:* Older adults, aged 65 or more.
- *Intervention:* Interventions for behaviour change aimed at health promotion, where recipients are able to maintain the behavioural change independently after the intervention ends. In addition, the interventions had to be feasible to offer within the framework of Swedish primary care or elderly care services.
- *Control:* Any other or no intervention, or single group with measurements before and after the intervention.
- *Outcomes:* Behaviour change, physical or psychological health, function, quality of life
- *Study design:* Systematic reviews of controlled clinical studies

Publication languages

English, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish

Databases searched

- APA PsycInfo (EBSCO)
- CINAHL (EBSCO)
- Epistemonikos
- International HTA Database

- Ovd MEDLINE® ALL
- Scopus (Elsevier)

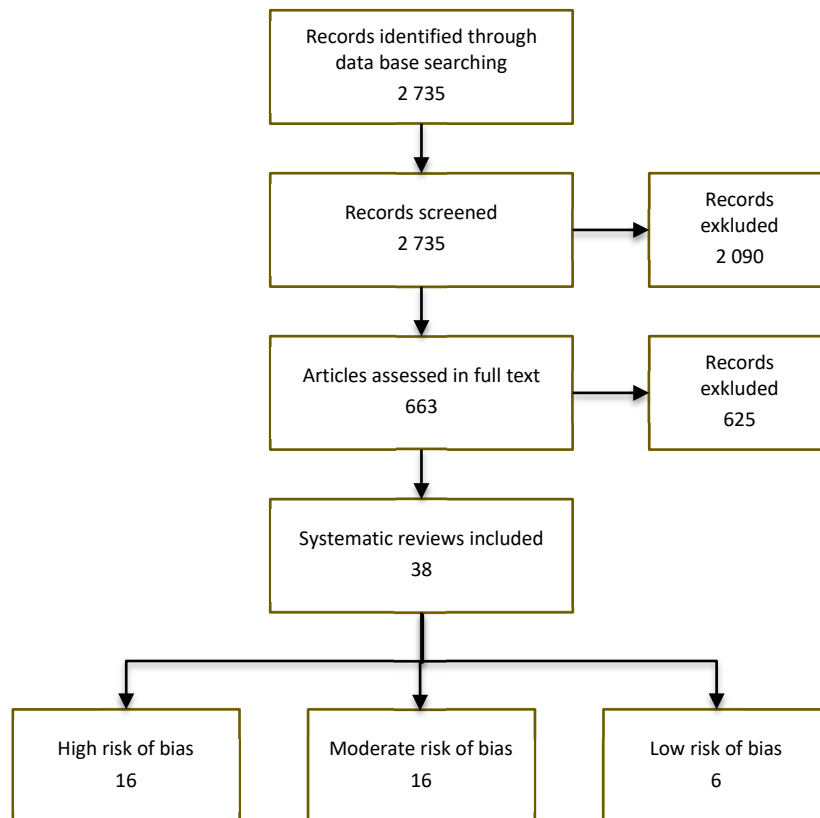
Results

A total of thirty-eight systematic reviews are included in the evidence map (Figure 2). Most of these reviews investigated interventions aimed at increasing physical activity to improve strength, cardiorespiratory fitness, or balance in older adults. Another substantial group focused on interventions designed to support self-care in age-related health conditions, such as diabetes or cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases. A smaller number of reviews evaluated interventions targeting other healthy lifestyle behaviours [The Evidence Map].

Of the 22 reviews assessed as sufficiently reliable (i.e., with low or moderate risk of bias), 7 reported positive effects on behaviour and/or health – 4 of these evaluated self-care interventions, and 3 focused on physical activity. One review found no effect, specifically assessing remote interventions intended to promote cognition. In the remaining 14 reviews, the authors concluded that the scientific evidence was insufficient to determine whether the interventions had any effect.

The evaluated interventions were often complex, typically comprising multiple components intended to facilitate behaviour change. Within individual reviews, the interventions varied in number and type of components included – or were described so sparsely that this variability was difficult to assess. This variability and lack of detail limited the authors' ability to synthesise findings and draw firm conclusions about the interventions' overall effectiveness. Only a minority of the reviews used a theoretical model for behaviour change to guide their evaluation.

Figure 2 Flow chart of the number of records identified in the systematic literature search, systematic reviews included in the map, and assessment of risk of bias in included reviews.



Conflicts of Interest

In accordance with SBU's requirements, the experts and scientific reviewers participating in this project have submitted statements about conflicts of interest. These documents are available at SBU's secretariat. SBU has determined that the conditions described in the submissions are compatible with SBU's requirements for objectivity and impartiality.

Project group

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 Search strategies (pdf)
- Appendix 2 Excluded references (pdf)
- Appendix 3 Characteristics of included systematic reviews (pdf)
- Appendix 4 Characteristics of Scoping reviews (pdf)