

Importance of Flexibility Training for Older Adults: A Narrative Review

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Abstract : Introduction: Mobility has been shown to play an important role of health and quality of life among older adults. Falls, which are often related to decreased mobility, as well as to neuromuscular deficits, represent the most common injury among older adults. Fall risk has been shown to increase with reduced lower extremity flexibility. The aim of the paper is to assess the importance of flexibility training on joint range of motion and functional performance among elderly population. Methods: We performed literature research on PubMed and evaluated articles published until 2000. The articles found in the search strategy were also added. The population of interest included older adults (≥ 65 years of age). Results: Flexibility training programs still represent an important part of several rehabilitation programs. Static stretching and proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation are the most frequently used techniques to improve the length of the muscle-tendon complex. Although the effectiveness of type of stretching seems to be related to age and gender, static stretching is a more appropriate technique to enhance shoulder, hip, and ankle range of motion in older adults. Stretching should be performed in multiple sets with holds of more than 60 seconds for a single muscle group. Conclusion: The literature suggests that flexibility training is an effective method to increase joint range of motion in older adults. In the light of increased functional outcome, activities such as strengthening, balance, and aerobic exercises should be incorporated into a training program for older people. Due to relatively little published literature, it is still not possible to prescribe detailed recommendations regarding flexibility training for older adults.

Keywords : elderly, exercise, flexibility, falls

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