

Risk of Bias

Overall, the trials were rated with low risk of bias related to the randomisation process. In four trials there were not reported that allocation sequence was concealed until participants were enrolled. Therefore, the studies were judged with “some concerns” (1-4). We judged “some concerns” related to the hospital distance as a determination of the randomisation group in one trial (5). Trialist has not always reported whether deviations arose because of the trial context. One trial included detailed description of how and when participants exercised alternatively (1) or the trials were consistent with the pre-registration of the trials (3, 6-11) and were judged low risk of bias. If the trial had no pre-registration or the analyses were inappropriate to estimate the effect of assignment, we judged the trials with “some concerns” related to the domain “deviations from intended interventions” (1, 3, 4, 8, 12-16). One trial (13) used an appropriate analysis to estimate the effect of the intended intervention, but the protocol deviated from the pre-registration which reported 3 sessions per week but were given twice per week. This resulted in “some concerns” related to the domain deviation from intended interventions.

We rated two of the trials with “high risk of bias” related to the domain “missing outcome” (8, 15), and the judgements were due to high dropout rates (48.5%) in one study (15) and dropouts related to COPD exacerbations in another trial (8), which may have affected the true value of the outcome. Other trials had smaller dropout rates, similar in both groups, which led to some concerns related to this affecting the outcome (4, 10, 13, 14, 17), or did not report on drop outs (4).

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