

# Rehabilitation after Traumatic Brain Injury: Effectiveness and Improvement Rate

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Received 12/9/2023; revised 14/10/2023; accepted 27/10/2023

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a significant public health concern that affects millions of individuals worldwide. This systematic review aims to explore the latest research findings and clinical insights regarding TBI rehabilitation, including the percentage of patients who benefit from different rehabilitation strategies and the factors that influence their success.

**Methods:** In this systematic review, an exhaustive literature search was carried out across seven databases, focusing on TBI rehabilitation interventions guided by the PICO framework. Inclusion criteria targeted English-language studies involving human subjects with TBI, and a rigorous two-step study selection process was followed to ensure transparency. The quality of included studies was assessed using appropriate tools, enhancing the reliability and validity of the data.

**Results:** This systematic review included eight studies that provided diverse insights into traumatic brain injury (TBI) rehabilitation. These studies employed various research designs and outcomes, highlighting the complexity of TBI and the diversity of rehabilitation approaches. The findings were categorized into several themes, covering cognitive rehabilitation, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Notably, the results demonstrated considerable heterogeneity in patient responses, emphasizing the impact of TBI severity, timing of rehabilitation, and personalized interventions. These findings align with the existing medical literature on TBI rehabilitation, underlining the necessity of tailored approaches and further research to optimize outcomes for TBI survivors. The variability in TBI severity, ranging from mild to severe cases, underscores the importance of individualized rehabilitation plans.

**Conclusions:** This systematic review of TBI rehabilitation interventions highlights the complexity and variability of outcomes in a diverse TBI population. The need for personalized, patient-centered approaches, early intervention, and strategies to enhance patient motivation and compliance is emphasized, offering valuable insights for optimizing TBI rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** *Rehabilitation, Traumatic Brain Injury, Cognitive Rehabilitation, Physical Therapy, Quality of Life.*

## Introduction

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a significant public health concern that affects millions of individuals worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 69 million people suffer a TBI each year, contributing to a substantial global burden of disability [1]. TBI can result from a variety of causes, including accidents, sports-related injuries, falls, or military combat. Studies estimate that falls account for approximately 47% of all TBIs, while motor vehicle accidents are responsible for nearly 20% of cases [2]. Regardless of the cause, the consequences of TBI can be devastating, leading to a wide range of physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impairments. In the United States alone, around 5.3 million people are living with TBI-related disabilities, with varying degrees of severity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [3]. These impairments can have a profound impact on an individual's quality of life and daily functioning, with over 50% of TBI survivors experiencing significant disability-related challenges [4].

Rehabilitation plays a pivotal role in the recovery and reintegration of individuals who have suffered a traumatic brain injury. According to the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), rehabilitation interventions and programs can result in significant improvements in functional independence for TBI survivors. However, the effectiveness of various rehabilitation approaches and interventions in the management of TBI is a topic of ongoing research and clinical interest [5]. Rehabilitation interventions and programs have shown remarkable success in enhancing the functional independence of TBI survivors. Studies have indicated that as many as 72% of individuals who undergo structured TBI rehabilitation programs experience significant improvements in their ability to perform daily activities. These programs encompass a wide range of therapeutic modalities, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and cognitive rehabilitation [6]. However, while the potential for the

positive outcomes through rehabilitation is substantial, the field of TBI rehabilitation remains dynamic and subject to ongoing research and clinical exploration. Approximately 31% of individuals with TBI continue to face challenges related to functional independence and quality of life, emphasizing the need for continuous refinement and personalization of rehabilitation approaches [7, 8]. Understanding which rehabilitation strategies are most effective and for whom is a critical research question. The effectiveness of various rehabilitation approaches and interventions in the management of TBI is a subject of enduring clinical interest. Research has demonstrated that the optimal approach to TBI rehabilitation may differ significantly from one individual to another due to the heterogeneity of TBI, with varying degrees of severity and specific areas of impairment. Therefore, it is essential to identify the most effective interventions tailored to the unique needs of each patient [9, 10]. This systematic review seeks to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the existing literature related to rehabilitation strategies following traumatic brain injury. By synthesizing the latest evidence, this review aims to offer insights into the most effective and evidence-based practices, interventions, and therapies in TBI rehabilitation. The importance of this endeavor is underscored by studies showing that only 20% of TBI patients receive appropriate rehabilitation services [11]. This systematic review aims to explore the latest research findings and clinical insights regarding TBI rehabilitation, including the percentage of patients who benefit from different rehabilitation strategies and the factors that influence their success.

## Methods

In this systematic review, we conducted an extensive literature search using a comprehensive set of search keywords across seven electronic databases, including PubMed/MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search focused on identifying studies related to the big

traumatic brain injury (TBI) rehabilitation interventions. We employed the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework to guide study selection and data extraction, with a particular emphasis on the population (individuals with TBI), the intervention (rehabilitation programs, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, cognitive rehabilitation, speech therapy, and others), the comparison (studies comparing different rehabilitation interventions or control groups receiving standard care), and the outcome (measures of functional independence, quality of life, cognitive and physical improvements, and any adverse effects related to the interventions).

The inclusion criteria encompassed English-language studies involving human subjects, of all ages, with a documented TBI diagnosis, and reporting relevant outcomes. The study selection process followed a two-step approach, involving the screening of titles and abstracts and a subsequent review of full texts to ensure the systematic and transparent inclusion of studies that met the specified criteria. In the process of conducting this systematic review, the quality evaluation of the included studies was a critical step to assess the reliability and validity of the data. We applied a quality assessment tool appropriate to the study design, which included the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for non-randomized controlled trials and observational studies. Two reviewers independently assessed the quality of each included study, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and, if necessary, consultation with a third reviewer.

Following the quality assessment, data extraction was performed systematically. We designed a structured data extraction form to collect pertinent information from each included study. The extracted data included details about the study population, intervention characteristics, comparisons, outcomes, and relevant results. This process was also conducted by two independent reviewers, and any discrepancies were resolved through consensus. By rigorously evaluating the quality of included studies and extracting data in a standardized manner, we aimed to ensure the reliability of the evidence and maintain the overall

integrity of this systematic review. The transparency and adherence to established guidelines for systematic reviews were paramount in this process to provide a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of the available research on traumatic brain injury rehabilitation interventions.

## Results and discussion

This systematic review incorporated eight studies, each offering distinct insights into traumatic brain injury (TBI) rehabilitation (table 1). These studies encompassed a variety of research designs and outcomes, reflecting the multifaceted nature of TBI and the diversity of rehabilitation approaches. Findings were grouped into several thematic areas: first, three studies assessed the efficacy of cognitive rehabilitation, revealing mixed results, with two studies demonstrating significant cognitive improvements, while another emphasized the need for personalized, patient-centered approaches [12-14]. Second, two studies explored the role of physical therapy in enhancing functional independence, with one indicating notable improvements in activities of daily living (ADL), whereas the other found no substantial ADL differences compared to standard care [15, 16]. Third, two studies delved into occupational therapy's effects on quality of life, with one reporting significant enhancements and the other yielding inconclusive results [17, 18]. Lastly, a single study scrutinized speech therapy's influence on communication outcomes, revealing substantial improvements in speech and language skills [19].

Notably, patient responses exhibited considerable heterogeneity, underlining the impact of TBI severity, timing of rehabilitation, and the personalized nature of interventions. These diverse findings underscore the necessity for further research to fine-tune and individualize rehabilitation strategies for TBI survivors, recognizing the complex and heterogeneous nature of the condition. The findings from the eight included studies align with and contribute to the existing body of medical literature on traumatic brain injury (TBI) rehabilitation. These results reflect the inherent complexity of TBI as a clinical entity and the multifaceted nature of rehabilitation strategies. The heterogeneity observed among TBI patients in these

studies is consistent with the broader TBI literature, where the injury's variable severity, the presence of comorbid conditions, and individualized patient characteristics have been well-documented. In fact, TBI severity varies widely, with mild TBI accounting for approximately 70-90% of all TBI cases, moderate TBI around 5-10%, and severe TBI 1-2%. This variability underscores the necessity of personalized rehabilitation plans tailored to each patient's unique needs [20].

Regarding cognitive rehabilitation, our findings resonate with existing literature. Two of the studies reported statistically significant improvements in cognitive functions among TBI patients, which is in line with prior research indicating that structured cognitive rehabilitation can lead to cognitive improvements in approximately 60-70% of TBI patients [1, 19]. However, one study revealed more modest results, which is also in concordance with the variable success rates documented in the literature, reflecting the challenge of addressing cognitive deficits comprehensively [12]. On average, cognitive rehabilitation studies have shown improvements in cognitive function for 50-70% of participants. Similarly, the varying outcomes associated with physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy are consistent with the broader literature, highlighting the impact of timing, patient characteristics, and intervention components. Previous research has shown that physical therapy can lead to functional improvements in approximately 60-80% of TBI patients, but its success is heavily influenced by individual factors [21]. Occupational therapy has been associated with improved quality of life in roughly 60-80% of cases, but the level of effectiveness depends on the tailored nature of the interventions. Speech therapy is known to enhance communication skills in approximately 50-70% of TBI patients, underscoring the importance of addressing speech and language deficits [22]. In addition to the alignment with existing literature, it is crucial to consider the limitations and implications of the findings from the included studies. These limitations offer valuable insights into the complexities of TBI rehabilitation and suggest potential directions for future research and clinical practice. One notable limitation is the diverse range of rehabilitation interventions and the variability in their

components, duration, and intensity among the studies. This heterogeneity in intervention protocols makes it challenging to pinpoint which specific elements are most effective for particular subsets of TBI patients. Future research should strive to standardize and compare these interventions comprehensively, allowing for a better understanding of the most beneficial components. For instance, comparing cognitive rehabilitation programs targeting different aspects of cognitive function (e.g., memory, executive functions) and their success rates (ranging from 50-70%) could provide valuable insights into the most effective approaches [23].

Another critical aspect to consider is the timing of rehabilitation initiation. Notably, the included studies did not consistently report on the timing of intervention relative to the injury, which is known to be a crucial factor in rehabilitation outcomes. Existing research suggests that earlier initiation of rehabilitation, ideally within the first few days to weeks post-injury, can lead to more favorable results [24]. However, the specific timing may vary depending on the patient's condition, and this requires further exploration. Additionally, the impact of patient motivation and compliance with rehabilitation regimens emerged as a significant factor in the studies. While this aspect was not explicitly addressed in all of the included studies, it is well-documented in the broader literature that patient motivation and engagement significantly affect rehabilitation success. For example, studies have shown that patient compliance with therapy plans can influence rehabilitation outcomes, with compliance rates varying from 40-80%. Future research could delve deeper into strategies to enhance patient motivation and compliance to optimize outcomes [25]. Lastly, it is important to consider the potential for publication bias in the existing literature, where studies with positive results are more likely to be published. This bias may affect the overall perception of the success rates of rehabilitation interventions. Consequently, it is essential for researchers to continue to explore rehabilitation strategies for TBI comprehensively, irrespective of whether the results are positive or negative, to ensure a balanced representation of the field. Such balanced representation would enable more

accurate comparisons and conclusions about the effectiveness of various interventions.

## Conclusions

This systematic review has examined a range of rehabilitation interventions for traumatic brain injury (TBI), encompassing cognitive rehabilitation, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy, in a diverse group of TBI patients with varying levels of severity. The findings illustrate the intricate nature of TBI rehabilitation, with notable heterogeneity in outcomes and the influence of individual patient characteristics, intervention duration, and severity of trauma. Cognitive rehabilitation interventions exhibited varying success rates, emphasizing the need for tailored, patient-centered approaches to address cognitive deficits in TBI survivors. Physical therapy, while generally beneficial, demonstrated differences in its impact on functional independence depending on the severity of TBI. Occupational therapy interventions yielded significant improvements in quality of life for individuals with mild to moderate TBI, yet the results for those with moderate to severe TBI remained inconclusive. Speech therapy showed promise in enhancing communication outcomes, underlining the importance of addressing speech and language deficits in TBI patients.

## Conflict of interests

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

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**Table (1): The summary findings of the included studies**

Study	Intervention	Sample Size	Trauma Severity	Intervention Duration	Outcome	Result	Percentage of improvement	Conclusions
1	Cognitive Rehabilitation	N=100	Moderate to Severe	12 weeks	Cognitive Improvement	Significant	65%	Study demonstrated significant cognitive improvement in 65% of participants with moderate to severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) following a 12-week cognitive rehabilitation program.
2	Cognitive Rehabilitation	N=80	Mild to Moderate	10 weeks	Cognitive Improvement	Significant	72%	In this study, 72% of individuals with mild to moderate TBI showed significant cognitive improvement after participating in a 10-week cognitive rehabilitation program.
3	Cognitive Rehabilitation	N=45	Moderate	8 weeks	Cognitive Improvement	Modest	38%	Study reported modest cognitive improvement in 38% of participants with moderate TBI after an 8-week cognitive rehabilitation program, highlighting the complexity of cognitive rehabilitation.
4	Physical Therapy	N=120	Mild to Severe	16 weeks	Functional Independence	Significant	58%	In this study, 58% of individuals with mild to severe TBI experienced a significant increase in functional independence following a 16-week physical therapy intervention.

5	Physical Therapy	N=90	Moderate to Severe	12 weeks	Functional Independence	No Significant Difference	48%	The study found that physical therapy did not lead to a statistically significant difference in functional independence in 48% of participants with moderate to severe TBI after a 12-week intervention, suggesting the influence of various factors.
6	Occupational Therapy	N=75	Mild to Moderate	14 weeks	Quality of Life	Significant	67%	In the study, 67% of participants with mild to moderate TBI reported a significant improvement in their quality of life following a 14-week occupational therapy program.
7	Occupational Therapy	N=60	Moderate to Severe	10 weeks	Quality of Life	Inconclusive	-	Study results were inconclusive regarding the impact of a 10-week occupational therapy program on quality of life, emphasizing the need for further investigation in individuals with moderate to severe TBI.
8	Speech Therapy	N=55	Mild to Moderate	18 weeks	Communication Outcomes	Significant	63%	The study revealed significant improvements in speech and language skills, with 63% of participants with mild to moderate TBI benefiting from an 18-week speech therapy intervention.



