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A Comprehensive Literature Review of Effectiveness of Vitamin D and Physical Performance and Falls in Older Adults

¹ Erick Persson Jeffry, ¹ Charles Sanjaya Seikka

¹ Faculty of Medicine, Veterans National Development University, Special
Region of Jakarta, Indonesia

² Internal Medicine Consultant, Kebonjati General Hospital, Bandung City,
Indonesia

Correspondence : erick.persson86@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: The effectiveness of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls among older adults has been a topic of considerable research and debate over the past several decades. **Literature Review:** Subsequent studies, such as the work by (M. Daly, 2010), further elucidated the importance of vitamin D in conjunction with exercise, highlighting that low serum 25(OH)D levels correlate with diminished muscle strength and increased fall risk. This relationship was echoed in research by (López-Torres Hidalgo, 2011), which demonstrated that combined calcium and vitamin D supplementation significantly improved musculoskeletal function and reduced falls among older adults. This points to the potential synergistic effects of these nutrients in promoting physical health. Meta-analyses, such as those conducted by (Bruyère et al., 2014) and (Rosendahl-Riise et al., 2017), reinforced the notion that vitamin D supplementation can reduce falls and non-vertebral fractures, particularly at dosages of 700–1000 IU per day. These findings suggest a clear dose-response relationship, emphasizing the critical role of adequate vitamin D levels in maintaining muscle strength and balance, which are essential for fall prevention. However, the literature also highlights significant variability in outcomes, as noted in the systematic review by (Prokopenko et al., 2022). While some studies reported positive effects of vitamin D on muscle function, others yielded inconclusive results, pointing to the need for further research to clarify the role of vitamin D in combatting sarcopenia and its associated risks. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, the literature presents compelling evidence supporting the effectiveness of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls among older adults, particularly at higher dosages. Nonetheless, the inconsistencies in findings across various studies underscore the complexity of vitamin D's role in muscle health and fall prevention. Continued research is essential to refine supplementation strategies, address individual variability in vitamin D metabolism, and establish clear guidelines for effective interventions in older populations.

Keyword: Effectiveness, Vitamin D, Physical Performance, Falls, Older Adults

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls among older adults has been a topic of considerable research and debate over the past several decades. The literature reveals a complex interplay between vitamin D levels, muscle strength, and the risk of falls, with various studies contributing to our understanding of this relationship.

In 1970, (Basir Ghafouri et al., 1970) examined the association between serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D levels and recurrent falls in the elderly, specifically noting that high serum concentrations of 1,25(OH)₂D₃ were linked to a decreased risk of falls, while higher 25(OH)D levels did not show a similar protective effect. This study highlighted the inconclusive nature of vitamin D's efficacy in fall prevention, suggesting that vitamin D supplementation might not universally improve muscle strength or reduce fall risk in older adults.

Building on this foundation, (M. Daly, 2010) explored the independent and combined effects of

exercise and vitamin D on muscle morphology and function in the elderly. This study indicated a significant relationship between low serum 25(OH)D levels and muscle strength, balance, and the risk of falls. It emphasized that adequate vitamin D levels could enhance muscle performance, particularly when higher doses of supplementation were employed, thus reinforcing the importance of dosage in achieving beneficial outcomes.

In a similar vein, (López-Torres Hidalgo, 2011) sought to determine the effectiveness of calcium and vitamin D supplementation in improving musculoskeletal function in older individuals. The findings supported the notion that vitamin D, in conjunction with calcium, could play a role in reducing falls and fractures, underscoring the relevance of these nutrients in the prevention of age-related musculoskeletal decline.

Further investigations by (Bruyère et al., 2014) consolidated evidence from randomized controlled trials, demonstrating that oral vitamin D supplementation significantly

reduced both falls and non-vertebral fractures in older adults, particularly at doses of 700–1000 IU per day. This meta-analysis highlighted a clear dose-response relationship, reinforcing the idea that effective supplementation must meet certain thresholds to yield protective benefits against falls.

The systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by (Rosendahl-Riise et al., 2017) added to the discourse by examining the effects of vitamin D on muscle strength and mobility. Their findings indicated that while vitamin D supplementation could prevent fractures, its impact on fall risk was less consistent, particularly when administered without calcium. This study emphasized the complexity of measuring fall incidence and the multifactorial nature of fall risk in older adults.

(Bischoff-Ferrari, 2018) further elucidated the relationship between vitamin D status and muscle health, noting that adequate vitamin D levels were positively associated with lower extremity function and a reduction in falls. This meta-analysis

corroborated previous findings that higher doses of vitamin D were necessary for effective fall prevention, reinforcing the critical role of vitamin D in maintaining muscle strength.

More recently, (Prokopidis et al., 2022) focused on the impact of vitamin D monotherapy on sarcopenia in community-dwelling older adults. Their systematic review highlighted mixed results regarding the efficacy of vitamin D supplementation on muscle strength and mobility, suggesting that while some studies reported positive outcomes, others showed minimal to no effect. This inconsistency points to the need for further research to clarify the role of vitamin D in combating sarcopenia and its associated risks.

Lastly, (Tan et al., 2024) conducted a comprehensive review and network meta-analysis of vitamin D supplementation's effects on fall prevention. Their findings indicated that higher doses of vitamin D supplementation significantly reduced the incidence of falls and non-vertebral fractures, supporting the notion that effective intervention

requires careful consideration of dosage and administration frequency.

Through these studies, the literature reveals a nuanced landscape regarding the effectiveness of vitamin D in promoting physical performance and preventing falls in older adults. While there is evidence supporting its benefits, particularly at higher doses, the variability in findings underscores the need for continued investigation into optimal supplementation strategies and their implications for older populations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The article titled "The association between serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D level and recurrent falls in the elderly population: a cohort study" by (Basir Ghafouri et al., 1970) presents a critical examination of the relationship between vitamin D metabolites and the incidence of falls in older adults. The study primarily focuses on the serum concentration of 1,25(OH)₂D₃ and 25(OH)D, revealing that while higher levels of 1,25(OH)₂D₃ are associated with a decreased risk of falls, elevated levels of 25(OH)D do not exhibit a similar protective effect.

This distinction is particularly noteworthy as it challenges the prevailing assumption that higher vitamin D levels universally correlate with improved physical performance and reduced fall risk in the elderly.

The findings align with a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials that reported no significant efficacy of vitamin D and calcium supplementation in preventing falls among the elderly. This suggests a potential disconnect between vitamin D supplementation strategies and their anticipated outcomes in fall prevention.

Furthermore, the article emphasizes the variability in vitamin D metabolism and absorption across individuals, which may contribute to differing outcomes in muscle strength and fall risk. The authors note that limited investigations suggest a potential increase in proximal muscle strength in those with vitamin D deficiency, yet they call for more robust evidence to substantiate universal recommendations for vitamin D supplementation aimed at improving physical performance in older adults.

Despite the valuable insights provided, the study acknowledges limitations, such as the inability to establish causal relationships and the exclusion of critical covariates in the analysis. This raises questions about the reliability of the conclusions drawn and highlights the need for further research to clarify the complex interactions between vitamin D levels, muscle performance, and fall risk.

The article "Independent and combined effects of exercise and vitamin D on muscle morphology, function and falls in the elderly" by (M. Daly, 2010) provides a comprehensive examination of the interplay between vitamin D levels, muscle function, and fall risk among older adults. The author presents a nuanced understanding of how inadequate nutrition, particularly low energy and protein intake, can impair skeletal muscle responses to exercise. However, the article emphasizes that low serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25(OH)D) levels are particularly detrimental to muscle health, highlighting a significant correlation between vitamin D deficiency and

various aspects of muscle performance.

Daly notes that proximal muscle weakness is a common manifestation of clinical vitamin D deficiency, which is underscored by the presence of vitamin D receptors in muscle tissue. The decline of these receptors with age points to a potential therapeutic avenue for addressing muscle-related issues in older adults. The article synthesizes findings from observational studies that link low serum 25(OH)D levels to accelerated muscle mass loss, diminished strength, reduced power output, compromised balance, and increased postural sway. This correlation suggests a dose-response relationship, where higher circulating levels of 25(OH)D are associated with improved muscle function.

Furthermore, the article discusses the implications of vitamin D deficiency on muscle fiber composition, particularly the atrophy of type II muscle fibers, which are crucial for activities that prevent falls. Clinical trials highlighted in the article reveal that vitamin D supplementation can lead to

significant improvements in lower extremity muscle performance and a reduction in fall risk among the elderly. Notably, Daly points out that some studies did not find a significant impact of vitamin D supplementation on muscle function, attributing this to the use of lower dosages. In contrast, a study cited in the article demonstrated that higher doses of vitamin D (800 IU/day) resulted in a remarkable 72% reduction in the rate of falls compared to placebo or lower dose regimens.

The article "Independent and Combined Effects of Exercise and Vitamin D on Muscle Morphology, Function and Falls in the Elderly" by (M. Daly, 2010) presents a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between vitamin D levels, muscle function, and fall risk among older adults. The study underscores the critical role of vitamin D in maintaining muscle strength and balance, which are essential for preventing falls in this vulnerable population.

Daly's findings highlight that vitamin D deficiency correlates with proximal muscle weakness and

diminished muscle function. This connection is particularly concerning given the aging population's increased susceptibility to falls, which can lead to serious health complications. The article discusses the dose-response relationship between serum levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25(OH)D) and muscle performance, suggesting that higher serum levels are associated with better muscle function. This relationship emphasizes the importance of adequate vitamin D levels for maintaining physical performance in older adults.

The article further elaborates on the impact of vitamin D supplementation on reducing fall risk. Notably, the research indicates that higher doses of vitamin D (specifically 800 IU/d) can lead to a significant reduction in fall rates—up to 72% compared to placebo. This finding is particularly relevant for healthcare practitioners and policymakers aiming to implement effective fall prevention strategies. The discussion of a meta-analysis within the article reinforces the notion that various dosages of vitamin D can yield a risk reduction in falls, indicating a robust body of evidence

supporting vitamin D supplementation.

However, the article also addresses the variability in study outcomes related to lower dose supplementation, suggesting that not all interventions yield significant benefits. This inconsistency in findings may indicate the necessity for individualized treatment plans based on specific patient needs and serum vitamin D levels. The absence of a gender effect in the observed benefits further strengthens the argument for universal vitamin D supplementation across different demographics within the elderly population.

The article "Prevention of falls and fractures in old people by administration of calcium and vitamin D. randomized clinical trial" by (López-Torres Hidalgo, 2011) presents a thorough investigation into the role of calcium and vitamin D supplementation in enhancing musculoskeletal function and reducing fall incidents among older adults. The study is particularly relevant in the context of growing concerns about the health and safety

of the aging population, especially regarding the risks of falls and subsequent fractures.

Hidalgo's research underscores the significant correlation between vitamin D serum levels and various aspects of physical performance, including muscle strength and overall mobility in older individuals. The randomized clinical trial design employed by the author adds credibility to the findings, as it allows for a robust examination of the effects of supplementation in a controlled environment. The study specifically targets individuals aged over 65 years, a demographic that is particularly vulnerable to falls and fractures due to age-related declines in muscle function and bone density.

The results of the study indicate that administration of vitamin D, in conjunction with calcium, leads to measurable improvements in musculoskeletal function. This is a critical point, as it suggests that nutritional interventions can be effective strategies for fall prevention in older adults. The article highlights the importance of maintaining adequate vitamin D

levels to support physical performance, which is essential for reducing fall risk.

However, while the study presents compelling evidence for the benefits of supplementation, it is essential to consider potential limitations. The sample size and duration of the study could impact the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the article does not delve deeply into the mechanisms by which vitamin D influences muscle strength and function, which could provide further insights into the underlying biological processes.

The article titled "Effects of vitamin D in the elderly population: current status and perspectives" by (Bruyère et al., 2014) provides a comprehensive examination of the role of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls among older adults. The authors emphasize the critical need for adequate vitamin D levels, particularly in the elderly, where deficiencies can lead to significant health risks, including proximal muscle weakness and gait impairments.

One of the pivotal findings of this article is that oral vitamin D supplementation can effectively reduce both falls and non-vertebral fractures, with a recommended dosage of 700–1000 IU per day to ensure protective benefits. This dosage is crucial, as it is linked to improved muscle strength, function, and balance—key factors in preventing falls among older individuals. The authors note that proximal muscle weakness is a common manifestation of vitamin D deficiency, underscoring the importance of maintaining sufficient vitamin D levels for optimal muscle function.

The article also highlights the positive correlation observed in various observational studies between higher serum 25(OH)D levels and enhanced lower extremity function in older adults. This relationship suggests that individuals with adequate vitamin D status are at a lower risk of functional decline and subsequent falls. Furthermore, the authors reference a meta-analysis that identified 17 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) demonstrating the efficacy of vitamin D treatment in

improving muscle strength-related outcomes, particularly among those with baseline 25(OH)D levels exceeding 25 nmol/l.

Importantly, the article discusses the physiological mechanisms underlying these benefits, specifically the activation of vitamin D receptors (VDRs) in muscle tissue, which appears to stimulate protein synthesis. This mechanism is critical for maintaining muscle integrity and function, thereby reducing the likelihood of falls.

The article "Vitamin D supplementation and its influence on muscle strength and mobility in community-dwelling older persons: a systematic review and meta-analysis" by (Rosendahl-Riise et al., 2017) presents a comprehensive examination of the impact of vitamin D supplementation on muscle strength and mobility among older adults. The authors effectively underscore the critical issue of sarcopenia, characterized by a decline in skeletal muscle mass and strength as individuals age, which significantly contributes to increased fall risk in this population.

The systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by the authors highlight that sarcopenia affects a notable percentage of older adults, with prevalence rates ranging from 5–13% in those aged 60-70 years and escalating to 11–50% in individuals over 80 years. This demographic shift toward an aging population makes the findings particularly relevant, as early and consistent interventions to counteract muscle mass and strength decline are deemed essential.

A critical evaluation of the article reveals that while the authors present a thorough analysis of existing studies, a limitation noted is the inability to ascertain the efficacy of vitamin D supplementation in isolation due to the concurrent inclusion of calcium in many studies. This presents a challenge in isolating the specific benefits of vitamin D, as both nutrients are often administered together in clinical settings. The authors suggest that vitamin D's role may be linked to its interaction with vitamin D receptors in skeletal muscle cells, which is crucial for optimal muscle function and protein synthesis.

Furthermore, the article effectively discusses the widespread prevalence of vitamin D deficiency among older adults, emphasizing its potential implications for muscle strength and fall risk. The association between adequate 25(OH)D levels and improved musculoskeletal function aligns with the growing body of evidence supporting the importance of vitamin D in maintaining physical performance in older populations.

The article "Relevance of vitamin D in muscle health" by (Bischoff-Ferrari, 2018) provides a comprehensive examination of the relationship between vitamin D levels and physical performance in older adults, particularly focusing on muscle health and fall risk. The author synthesizes findings from various observational studies and randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to underscore the significance of adequate vitamin D status for maintaining lower extremity function in this population.

One of the key insights from the article is the positive correlation between higher serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D [25(OH)D] levels

and improved lower extremity function. This association is crucial because it highlights the role of vitamin D not only in bone health but also in muscle strength and balance, which are critical components for preventing falls in older adults. The article notes that vitamin D supplementation has been shown to enhance strength, function, and balance among older individuals at risk for deficiency, thereby contributing to a reduction in fall rates.

The author emphasizes that vitamin D deficiency can lead to muscular impairment even before it affects bone health. This finding is significant, as it suggests that the protective effects of vitamin D against fractures may extend beyond its well-documented benefits on calcium absorption and bone mineral density. The article posits that muscle weakness is a major risk factor for falls, and since the majority of fractures in older adults occur as a result of falls, addressing muscle health through adequate vitamin D levels could be a key strategy in fracture prevention.

Furthermore, (Bischoff-Ferrari, 2018) highlights the findings of a recent meta-analysis that reviewed 17 RCTs focused on muscle strength-related outcomes following vitamin D treatment. The results consistently indicated that higher doses of vitamin D, specifically between 700 to 1000 IU per day, were effective in reducing fall risk, while lower doses did not yield the same protective effects. This delineation is crucial for clinical practice, as it provides guidance on the minimum effective dosage of vitamin D for fall prevention in older adults.

The article "Effect of vitamin D monotherapy on indices of sarcopenia in community-dwelling older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis" by provides a thorough examination of the relationship between vitamin D supplementation and its effects on sarcopenia, muscle function, and the physical performance of older adults. The authors highlight the critical issue of sarcopenia, characterized by the progressive loss of muscle mass and strength, which significantly increases the risk of falls and fractures among the elderly population. This

systematic review aims to clarify the effects of vitamin D as a singular intervention in addressing these concerns.

The authors present a nuanced analysis of existing literature, noting that while preliminary evidence suggests potential benefits of vitamin D supplementation on muscle mass and strength, the overall impact remains inconclusive. They emphasize that vitamin D is hypothesized to enhance skeletal muscle function through mechanisms such as the up-regulation of mitochondrial ATP production. However, the article critically evaluates the mixed findings reported in various studies regarding the correlation between vitamin D levels and specific physical performance metrics, such as appendicular lean mass and strength measures like handgrip and knee extension.

One of the pivotal insights from this article is the caution advised regarding high-dose vitamin D supplementation, particularly in individuals who already possess adequate vitamin D levels. The authors indicate that such

supplementation may paradoxically increase the risk of falls, underscoring the complexity of vitamin D's role in musculoskeletal health. This finding raises important questions about the dosage and context of vitamin D supplementation, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be appropriate for older adults.

In terms of methodology, the systematic review and meta-analysis approach employed by is commendable, as it synthesizes a wide array of studies to derive more comprehensive conclusions. However, the authors also note the limitations in the current body of research, particularly the lack of consensus on the independent effects of vitamin D supplementation on sarcopenia indices in community-dwelling older adults.

The article titled "Effect of vitamin D, calcium, or combined supplementation on fall prevention: a systematic review and updated network meta-analysis" by (Tan et al., 2024) provides a comprehensive examination of the impacts of vitamin D supplementation on fall prevention among older adults. The authors

synthesize findings from various studies, including randomized clinical trials, to evaluate the effectiveness of vitamin D and calcium in enhancing physical performance and reducing fall risk.

The systematic review highlights the significance of vitamin D in maintaining muscle strength and physical function, which are critical factors for preventing falls in older populations. The authors reference a range of studies, including the ViDA trial and the D-Health trial, which collectively demonstrate that high-dose vitamin D supplementation can lead to a notable reduction in fall incidence among older adults. For instance, the findings from the ViDA trial indicate that monthly high-dose vitamin D supplementation significantly decreased the risk of falls and non-vertebral fractures, underscoring the potential of vitamin D in fall prevention strategies.

Moreover, the article critically evaluates the methodologies employed in the studies reviewed, emphasizing the variability in dosing regimens and the populations studied. This variability raises important

questions regarding the optimal dosage and frequency of vitamin D supplementation necessary to achieve the desired outcomes in fall prevention. The authors suggest that while high-dose vitamin D appears beneficial, the response may differ based on individual health status, baseline vitamin D levels, and concurrent use of calcium supplements.

In addition to discussing fall prevention, the article also addresses the broader implications of vitamin D on physical performance. The authors note that vitamin D deficiency is prevalent among older adults and is associated with declines in muscle strength and functional ability. They argue that addressing vitamin D deficiency through supplementation could play a crucial role in enhancing the overall physical health of older adults, thereby reducing the risk of falls and associated injuries.

CONCLUSION

The body of literature surrounding the effectiveness of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls in older adults reveals a

multifaceted relationship characterized by both supportive evidence and notable inconsistencies. Early investigations, such as the cohort study by (Basir Ghafouri et al., 1970), identified a complex association between different forms of vitamin D and fall risk, suggesting that while high levels of 1,25(OH)₂D₃ may decrease fall risk, elevated levels of 25(OH)D do not exhibit the same protective effect. This finding underscores the necessity of distinguishing between various vitamin D metabolites when assessing their impact on physical performance.

Subsequent studies, such as the work by (M. Daly, 2010), further elucidated the importance of vitamin D in conjunction with exercise, highlighting that low serum 25(OH)D levels correlate with diminished muscle strength and increased fall risk. This relationship was echoed in research by (López-Torres Hidalgo, 2011), which demonstrated that combined calcium and vitamin D supplementation significantly improved musculoskeletal function and reduced falls among older adults. This points to the potential synergistic

effects of these nutrients in promoting physical health.

Meta-analyses, such as those conducted by (Bruyère et al., 2014) and (Rosendahl-Riise et al., 2017), reinforced the notion that vitamin D supplementation can reduce falls and non-vertebral fractures, particularly at dosages of 700–1000 IU per day. These findings suggest a clear dose-response relationship, emphasizing the critical role of adequate vitamin D levels in maintaining muscle strength and balance, which are essential for fall prevention.

However, the literature also highlights significant variability in outcomes, as noted in the systematic review by (Prokopidis et al., 2022). While some studies reported positive effects of vitamin D on muscle function, others yielded inconclusive results, pointing to the need for further research to clarify the role of vitamin D in combatting sarcopenia and its associated risks. Additionally, (Tan et al., 2024) noted that high-dose vitamin D supplementation could significantly reduce falls, but the variability in study methodologies

raises questions about optimal dosing strategies.

In conclusion, the literature presents compelling evidence supporting the effectiveness of vitamin D supplementation in enhancing physical performance and reducing falls among older adults, particularly at higher dosages. Nonetheless, the inconsistencies in findings across various studies underscore the complexity of vitamin D's role in muscle health and fall prevention. Continued research is essential to refine supplementation strategies, address individual variability in vitamin D metabolism, and establish clear guidelines for effective interventions in older populations.

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