

A systematic review of interventions to enhance occupational balance in adults

Stefanie Lentner¹, Evelyn Haberl¹, Larisa Baciu¹, Mona Dür², Cornelia Lischka², Mandana Fallahpour³, Susanne Guidetti³ & Hanna Köttl¹



¹ Institute Therapeutic and Midwifery Sciences, IMC Krems University of Applied Sciences, Austria

² Duervation GmbH, Krems, Austria

³ Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society, Division of Occupational Therapy, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

Background

The increasing pace and complexity of adult everyday life challenge individuals' ability to balance daily occupations. **Occupational balance** refers to the subjective perception of having the right amount and variation of meaningful activities, including work, household tasks, leisure, and rest.

(1). It is strongly associated with health, well-being, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Both over- and under-engagement in activities, limited control over time use, and mismatches between desired and required occupations can reduce occupational balance and negatively affect health.

The detrimental impacts of decreased occupational balance among adults are increasingly acknowledged, and interventions are emerging. A comprehensive review of these interventions, targeting occupational balance in diverse adult populations, is needed to ensure effective implementation into both clinical and public health settings.

Objective

This systematic literature review aimed to identify and synthesize existing interventions that address occupational balance among adults in diverse contexts, and to evaluate their effectiveness.

Method

This review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines and was pre-registered in PROSPERO (CRD42023423689). Peer-reviewed studies published in English or German between 2000 and 2024 were eligible for inclusion. Included studies involved adults (≥ 18 years), with or without diagnoses, and evaluated interventions targeting occupational balance as a primary or secondary outcome using standardized occupational balance instruments. Experimental, quasi-experimental, and observational study designs were included. Qualitative or mixed-method studies were excluded. A comprehensive literature search was conducted in April 2024, in PubMed, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, and EMBASE. Methodological quality was assessed using NHLBI quality assessment tools. The selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

The RE-AIM framework informed data extraction (2). A narrative synthesis was performed to identify patterns, explore relationships, and summarize the direction and effectiveness of interventions targeting occupational balance.

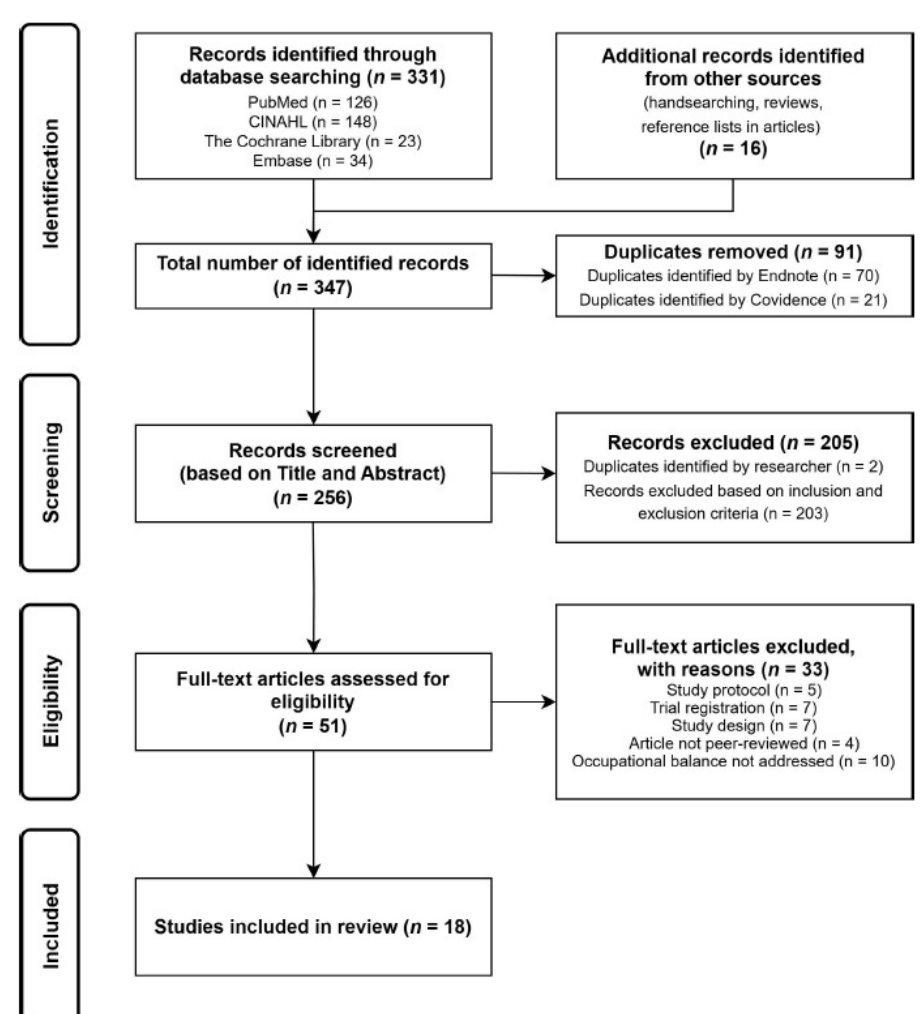


Fig 1. Prisma flow chart of the literature search and review process.

This poster is based on: Lentner et al. (2025). Interventions promoting occupational balance in adults: A systematic literature review. *PLoS One*, 20(6), e0325061.



Copyright © 2026 Stefanie Lentner
stefanie.lentner@imc.ac.at

Results

Of the 347 records identified, 18 publications were included in this review. Study designs comprised randomized controlled trials, observational studies, and pre-post studies. Most participants had specific diagnoses, with a predominance of mental health conditions. The review identified 12 interventions aimed at promoting occupational balance, providing an overview of interventions' target groups, goals, features, and content. Overall effectiveness of identified interventions varied across studies, with six demonstrating statistically significant improvements in occupational balance scores. Clinically meaningful changes were observed in areas such as drug craving, social isolation, and work ability.

Interventions promoting occupational balance in adults

- Redesign your EVERYday Activities and Lifestyle with Occupational Therapy (REVEAL(OT)) (3)
- Leisure intervention (4)
- Balancing Everyday Life (BEL) (5-8)
- The Tree Theme Method (TTM) (9-12)
- Time use intervention (13)
- Psychoeducational program (14)
- Ballroom dancing classes (15)
- Occupation-based sleep program (16)
- Web-based time use intervention (17)
- ReDesigning Daily Occupations (ReDO) (18)
- Swedish Version of Let's Get Organized (LGO-S) (19)
- Action Over Inertia (AOI) (20)

Table 1. Information on Interventions

Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Persons with chronic pain, mental illness (e.g. depression, anxiety, schizophrenia), substance use disorders, insomnia• Students and working-age adults (incl. women on or at risk of sick leave)• Individuals affected by social isolation or pandemic-related restrictions
Overall goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote occupational balance, health and well-being• Enhance engagement in meaningful activities• Improve time use, routines, and lifestyle habits• Support recovery, coping, and participation in everyday life
Intervention characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formats: Individual and group-based interventions• Settings: Mainly in-person; some web-based programs• Duration: Short-term (1–8 weeks) to long-term (up to 16 weeks)• Leadership: All interventions led by trained occupational therapists
Core components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Psychoeducation (occupational balance, lifestyle, sleep, stress, time management)• Reflective activities (self-analysis, diaries, storytelling, goal setting)• Practical engagement in meaningful occupations (e.g. leisure, physical activity, daily routines)• Planning and restructuring of daily activities and routines• Use of tools (e.g. time-use analysis, calendars, activity trackers)
Key outcomes targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved awareness of everyday activity patterns• Better balance between productivity, leisure, and rest• Increased participation in meaningful occupations• Enhanced self-management and long-term sustainability of routines

Discussion

The reviewed interventions were predominantly delivered in group settings, which appear beneficial for fostering reflection, peer exchange, and sustainable lifestyle changes. Most interventions were implemented in outpatient or community-near contexts, while evidence for inpatient and digital interventions remains limited, despite their potential relevance for integrating changes into everyday life. Across interventions, common core components included education and self-reflection on occupational balance and time use, goal setting, habit formation, and the integration of changes into daily routines. Interventions addressed both meaningful and purposeful occupations, which seems particularly important in group-based formats

Although sleep is recognized as a critical component of occupational balance, it remains underrepresented in current interventions. Several interventions demonstrated statistically and clinically meaningful improvements in occupational balance, activity levels, and psychosocial functioning; however, findings should be interpreted with caution due to heterogeneous outcome measures, small sample sizes, and variable study quality. Measuring occupational balance remains challenging because of its conceptual complexity and lack of standardized assessment tools. Social relationships were rarely examined as outcomes despite their relevance for occupational balance. In addition, study populations were dominated by female participants and working-age adults, with limited evidence for older populations, and all studies were conducted in high-income Western countries, raising concerns about cultural transferability.

Strength and limitations

Strengths: PRISMA adherence, registered protocol, quality appraisal, broad population scope

Limitations: exclusion of qualitative/mixed-method studies, high heterogeneity, no meta-analysis

Implications for research and practice

- Define clearer and more consistent definitions and measures of occupational balance
- Develop more digital, community-based, and low-threshold interventions
- Ensure stronger integration of social and contextual factors in practice and research
- Occupational balance should be addressed not only at an individual level, but also through policy and structural measures (e.g. flexible work, childcare, support for caregivers)

Conclusion

This is the first review synthesizing interventions for promoting occupational balance and enhancing health, well-being, and life satisfaction across various settings and in diverse adult populations. Further research should employ controlled experimental designs to evaluate interventions addressing occupational balance across diverse populations, addressing gender and age differences while assessing effectiveness across delivery modes and settings.

References

1. Wagman P, Håkansson C, Björklund A. Occupational balance as used in occupational therapy: a concept analysis. *Scand J Occup Ther.* 2012;19(4):322–7. <https://doi.org/10.3109/11038128.2011.596219>
2. Estabrooks P, Glasgow R, Harden S, Ory M, Rabin B. RE-AIM improving public health relevance and population health impact. 2024. <https://re-aim.org/resources-and-tools/measure-and-checklists/>
3. Nielsen SS, Skou ST, Larsen AE, Polianskis R, Arendt-Nielsen L, Østergaard AS, et al. Changes in pain, daily occupations, lifestyle, and health following an occupational therapy lifestyle intervention: a secondary analysis from a feasibility study in patients with chronic high-impact pain. *Scand J Pain.* 2023;24(1):10.1515/sjpain-2023-0043. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sjpain-2023-0043>
4. Farhadian M, Akbarfahimi M, Hassani Abharian P, Khalafbeigi M, Yazdani F. The effect of leisure intervention on occupational performance and occupational balance in individuals with substance use disorder: a pilot study. *Occup Ther Int.* 2024;2024:6299073. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/6299073>
5. Eklund M, Tjörnstrand C, Sandlund M, Argentzell E. Effectiveness of Balancing Everyday Life (BEL) versus standard occupational therapy for activity engagement and functioning among people with mental illness - a cluster RCT study. *BMC Psychiatry.* 2017;17(1):363. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-017-1524-7>
6. Argentzell E, Bäckström M, Lund K, Eklund M. Exploring mediators of the recovery process over time among mental health service users, using a mixed model regression analysis based on cluster RCT data. *BMC Psychiatry.* 2020;20(1):520. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02924-2>
7. Eklund M, Lund K, Argentzell E. The impact of the BEL intervention on levels of motivation, engagement and recovery in people who attend community mental health services. *Scand J Occup Ther.* 2023;30(6):862–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2023.2184717>
8. Hultqvist J, Lund K, Argentzell E, Eklund M. Predictors of clinically important improvements in occupational and quality of life outcomes among mental health service users after completion and follow-up of a lifestyle intervention: multiple regression modelling based on longitudinal data. *BMC Psychol.* 2019;7(1):83. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-019-0359-z>
9. Håkansson C, Gunnarsson AB, Wagman P. Occupational balance and satisfaction with daily occupations in persons with depression or anxiety disorders. *J Occup Sci.* 2021;30(2):196–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2021.1939111>
10. Gunnarsson A, Wagman P, Hedin K, Håkansson C. Treatment of depression and/or anxiety - outcomes of a randomised controlled trial of the tree theme method® versus regular occupational therapy. *BMC Psychol.* 2018;6(1):25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-018-0237-0>
11. Gunnarsson AB, Håkansson C, Hedin K, Wagman P. Outcomes of the tree theme method versus regular occupational therapy: a longitudinal follow-up. *Aust Occup Ther J.* 2022;69(4):379–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12796>
12. Wagman P, Gunnarsson AB, Hjärthag F, Hedin K, Håkansson C. Quality of life, sense of coherence and occupational balance one year after an occupational therapy intervention for people with depression and anxiety disorders. *Work.* 2023;76(2):561–8. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-220096>
13. Jung JH, Ko JY, Hong I, Jung M-Y, Park J-H. Effects of a time-use intervention in isolated patients with coronavirus disease 2019: a randomized controlled study. *PLoS One.* 2023;18(6):e0287118. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287118>
14. Ryan D, Naughton M, de Faoite M, Dowd T, Morrissey A-M. An occupation-based lifestyle lecture intervention as part of inpatient addiction recovery treatment: exploring occupational performance, balance and personal recovery. *Subst Abuse.* 2023;17:11782218231165123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11782218231165123>
15. Ferreira de Sousa I, Mendonça Magalhães F, Seabra Castilho Simões S, da Silva Oliveira I, Nazareth Dias A, Mendes Paranhos A. Ballroom dancing as a strategy for occupational balance and stress reduction in university students in the health area. *Revista Família, Ciclos de Vida e Saúde no Contexto Social.* 2022;10(2).
16. Ho ECM, Siu AMH. Evaluation of an occupation-based sleep programme for people with insomnia. *Hong Kong J Occup Ther.* 2022;35(2):168–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15691861221136261>
17. Pekçetin S, Günel A. Effect of web-based time-use intervention on occupational balance during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Can J Occup Ther.* 2021;88(1):83–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008417421994967>
18. Olsson A, Erlandsson L-K, Håkansson C. The occupation-based intervention REDO™-10: long-term impact on work ability for women at risk for or on sick leave. *Scand J Occup Ther.* 2020.
19. Hultqvist J, Lund K, Argentzell E, Eklund M. Predictors of clinically important improvements in occupational and quality of life outcomes among mental health service users after completion and follow-up of a lifestyle intervention: multiple regression modelling based on longitudinal data. *BMC Psychol.* 2019;7(1):83. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-019-0359-z>
20. Edgelow M, Krupa T. Randomized controlled pilot study of an occupational time-use intervention for people with serious mental illness. *Am J Occup Ther.* 2011;65(3):267–76. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2011.001313>



Part of the research project:
Collaborative Research on
Occupational Balance



FUNDED AS PART OF THE RTI-STRATEGY
LOWER AUSTRIA 2027

(Grant: FTI21-P-005)

Copyright © 2026 Stefanie Lentner
stefanie.lentner@imc.ac.at