

Can telemedicine be an alternative to on-site physiotherapy care?

February 1 2024, by Jan Vestweber



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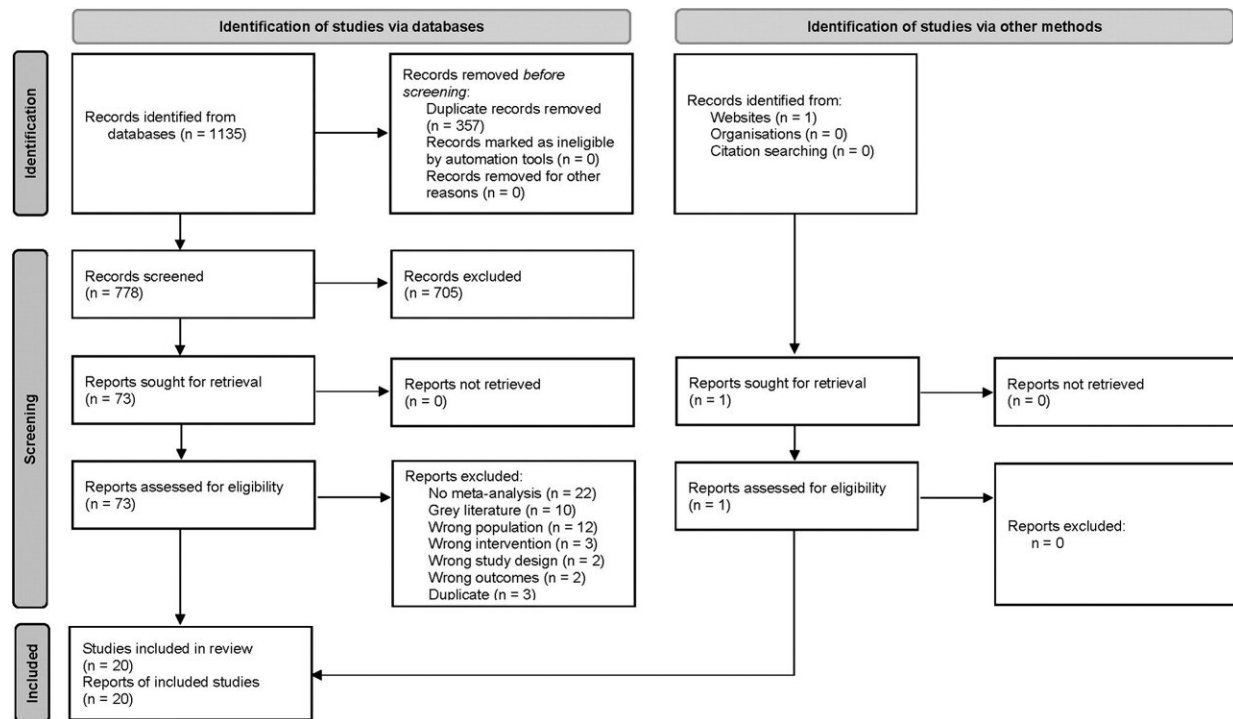
Back, knee and hip pain as well as osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia are among the most common reasons for incapacity to work and restrictions

in everyday life. More than 100 million people in Europe suffer from it. Usually, this pain is treated in local doctor's and physiotherapy practices.

In recent years, however, the number of digital therapy applications has increased rapidly. This brings some advantages such as increased flexibility and self-efficacy. But can digital therapy actually bring the desired treatment success?

A research team from the Hochschule für Gesundheit (University of Applied Sciences) in Bochum, Germany led by Svenja Kaczorowski, research assistant and Ph.D. student, and Prof. Dr. Daniel Belavy, Professor of Physiotherapy, investigated this question and examined the results of 97 randomized controlled trials with a total of 15,872 participants with [musculoskeletal pain](#). The results are [published](#) in the journal *Telemedicine and e-Health*.

The results showed that telemedicine can relieve pain and improve physical functioning. "However, further research needs to focus on whether telemedicine is as effective as high-quality physiotherapy," says Kaczorowski. "So far, most studies have focused on comparing telemedicine with no or minimal intervention. This comparison can be particularly helpful if, for example, waiting times until the start of therapy are to be effectively bridged."



PRISMA search flow diagram. Credit: *Telemedicine and e-Health* (2023). DOI: 10.1089/tmj.2023.0255

Furthermore, video consultations in particular should be more in the focus of research in order not to neglect the personal component in digital therapy. "Overall, however, we see a tendency that telemedicine is effective for musculoskeletal pain and can be considered as an additional option to on-site therapy," Kaczorowski says.

"Of course, the suitability of telemedicine in people's everyday lives has not yet been fully investigated," says Belavy. "But if someone from my friends or family asked me for my opinion, I would recommend trying telemedicine: It can help effectively and you save the time of going to the physio practice."

More information: Svenja Kaczorowski et al, Telemedicine for Patients with Musculoskeletal Pain Lacks High-Quality Evidence on Delivery Modes and Effectiveness: An Umbrella Review, *Telemedicine and e-Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1089/tmj.2023.0255](https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2023.0255)

Provided by Hochschule für Gesundheit

Citation: Can telemedicine be an alternative to on-site physiotherapy care? (2024, February 1) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-telemedicine-alternative-site-physiotherapy.html>

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