

REVIEW

Bariatric Surgery

Exercise and bariatric surgery: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the feasibility and acceptability of exercise and controlled trial methods

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Summary

This systematic review and meta-analysis assessed the feasibility and acceptability of exercise and controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery (BS). Search methods used to identify relevant articles were inclusion of articles identified in a systematic review, new database search of articles published 2019–2021, and hand searching reference lists. Titles/abstracts and full-texts were screened by two reviewers independently against inclusion criteria: adults awaiting or having undergone BS, controlled trial, exercise group compared with a comparison group without exercise. Twenty-eight articles were reviewed; most interventions were supervised, performed after BS, and lasted ≤ 13 weeks. Pooled data for exercise intervention attendance and dropout rates were 84% ($k = 10$) and 5% ($k = 19$), respectively, though possibly misestimated due to poor/selective reporting. Median study and recruitment duration were 18 weeks and 24 months, respectively, with a pooled enrollment rate of 2.5 participants/month. Pooled data for refusal to participate, enrollment, and retention rates were 23% ($k = 16$), 43% ($k = 18$), and 87% ($k = 26$), respectively. Despite the lack of data available in studies included, exercise and controlled trial methods seem feasible and acceptable for adults awaiting or having undergone BS. To better identify methodological or practical challenges, and assess bias, better reporting of feasibility and acceptability indicators is needed in future studies.

KEYWORDS

adherence, dropout, obesity, physical activity

1 | INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of severe obesity, defined by a body mass index ≥ 35 kg/m², is constantly increasing in higher income countries.¹ World-wide, the number of adults with obesity increased from 100 million in 1975 to 671 million in 2016.¹ Severe obesity increases the risk of morbidity and mortality, and reduces quality of life.^{2–5} Treatment of severe obesity by bariatric surgery is generally effective for long-term weight loss, and can offer additional benefits (e.g., reduced relative risk of morbidity and mortality and improved quality of life).^{6,7} As a result, the number of bariatric surgery procedures around the world has risen dramatically in recent years, with 604,223 surgeries performed in 2018.⁸

Controlled trials provide evidence that exercise is an important part of care before and after bariatric surgery, as it can help to maintain or enhance the short- and long-term benefits of surgery.^{9–12} Previous reviews showed that exercise positively impacts cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle strength, cardiometabolic health, and weight and fat loss after bariatric surgery.^{9,11,12} However, general questions regarding the feasibility and acceptability of exercise for adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery remain unanswered as previous reviews^{9–11,13–20} focused on summarizing the effects of exercise on outcomes of interest.

Summarizing the evidence for the feasibility and acceptability of exercise is needed for guidance of professionals and to help implementation in the field.²¹ In addition, this information may serve to identify potential aspects of the intervention in need of refinement during implementation. By extension, whether the methods used in controlled trials to assess the effects of exercise are both feasible and acceptable is critical as it can impact the outcomes, provide a higher level of evidence for future guideline updates, and provide a basis for selecting certain methods in future research (e.g., opt for some recruitment strategies over others).²¹ As well, it can help elucidate potential methodological or practical challenges warranting attention (e.g., time, resources, and data management) early on during the developmental phase of the research to ensure successful trial completion. This is especially needed given the limited resources generally available.

Thus, the objective of this systematic review and meta-analysis of published controlled trials were to (i) assess the evidence of the feasibility and acceptability of exercise (intervention) and controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery and (ii) identify factors associated with feasibility and acceptability outcomes. While there are no universally accepted definitions for feasibility and acceptability adopted by authors of such controlled trials, feasibility was considered to reflect whether the exercise intervention can be delivered to participants as planned and whether the methods (e.g., assessment protocol) can be successfully executed by the researchers,²² and acceptability was considered to reflect the suitability of the exercise intervention and methods from the perspective of intended users (e.g., adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery) or those responsible for implementation (e.g., healthcare providers delivering the intervention, research staff recruiting participants).²²

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Protocol and registration

The protocol for this systematic review and meta-analysis was registered in the Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) international registry (CRD42021255048, 07/2021), and it is reported according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines.²³ The completed PRISMA checklist is presented in Supporting Information S1. All supporting information and R data are available on Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/h4p27/>).

2.2 | Data sources and searches

Three search methods were used to identify relevant articles. The first method was to include all articles found in a systematic review and meta-analysis published in June 2021 on exercise training and bariatric surgery.⁹ As the authors' database search was limited to articles published prior to January 2019, the second method was to update the database search, and search for articles published from January 1, 2019, onwards. This search was performed by two reviewers (MSP, ABa) in April 2021 using three databases: PubMed, Web of Science, and EMBASE. The search strategies for each database were developed using the same strategies as in Bellicha et al. (see supporting information with search strategy in Bellicha et al.⁹). "Feasibility" and "acceptability" were not added as terms to be able to retrieve as many articles as possible. The third method was to hand-search reference lists from eligible articles and relevant reviews^{10,11,13–20} to identify other potentially relevant articles; this search was completed by one reviewer (MSP).

2.3 | Eligibility criteria

To be included, articles had to (i) be an English-language full-text article reporting on primary research published in a peer-reviewed journal; (ii) involve a controlled trial, either randomized or non-randomized, comparing an exercise group to a control group without exercise, and (iii) include adults (≥ 18 years) awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery. Articles were excluded if they only presented a study focused on behavioral interventions to promote exercise engagement. Systematic reviews (with or without meta-analyses), study protocols without results, grey literature, case reports, letters/commentaries, animal studies, observational quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies, and published abstracts were also excluded.

2.4 | Study selection of the updated search

Once the database searches were completed, records of the articles retrieved were imported into Endnote X9.3.3. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened concurrently against

selection criteria by two reviewers (ABa, MSP). Full-texts were obtained for potentially relevant articles and screened against selection criteria by two reviewers (ABa, MSP). Where there was disagreement on eligibility, a third reviewer (JB) assessed the full-texts of the articles in detail against the selection criteria and discussions took place to determine whether the articles should be included. Next, the reference lists of the eligible articles and relevant reviews were reviewed.

2.5 | Data extraction

Data pertaining to study details, participants' characteristics, exercise intervention and comparison group(s), and outcomes were extracted and entered into a Microsoft Excel table developed for this review by one reviewer (WC) and checked by two other reviewers (LB and MSP). See Supporting Information S2 for more details.

Feasibility and acceptability data were also extracted and entered into a Microsoft Excel table by one reviewer (MSP) and checked by another reviewer (ABa). Disagreements were discussed and resolved by a third reviewer (JB). To ensure a comprehensive synthesis of feasibility and acceptability evidence, the following approach was used. Data presented in the CONSORT flow chart (where applicable) were extracted for each group. Then, all data reflecting feasibility or acceptability outcomes were extracted from each article including: (i) number of participants who discontinued the intervention and reasons¹; (ii) participants' satisfaction ratings/scores; (iii) reported attendance rate related to session frequency (i.e., among participants analyzed, percentage of participants who attended all or a certain percentage of prescribed sessions according to the definition given by the authors of included articles)²⁴; (iv) reported compliance rate related to session duration and intensity (i.e., among participants analyzed, percentage of participants who met all or a certain percentage of prescribed session duration and intensity according to the definition given by the authors of included articles)²⁴; (v) number and type of adverse events related to exercise intervention only (e.g., fall and injury), and (vi) other quantitative or qualitative data showing feasibility and acceptability of the intervention.

Additional data for feasibility and acceptability of controlled trial methods were extracted and included (i) number of participants assessed for eligibility (i.e., number recruited); (ii) number of participants excluded and reasons for exclusion (e.g., did not meet eligibility criteria, declined to participate, other reasons); (iii) number of participants randomized, number of participants who refused randomization and refusal reasons; (iv) number of participants allocated to each group; (v) number of participants who received allocated intervention (i.e., number who started the intervention), and number of participants who did not receive allocated intervention (i.e., number randomized to the intervention but did not start the intervention) and reasons;

(vi) number of participants lost to follow-up (i.e., number who started assessments, but did not complete them until the end of the study) and reasons²; (vii) number of participants analyzed, and number excluded from analysis and reasons; (viii) recruitment strategies (description and classification into active (contact with participants was made by the research team [e.g., clinician referral, phone calls]) or passive (contact was made by potential participants [e.g., self-referral by poster, newspaper advertisements])),²⁵ (ix) recruitment duration in months, (x) missing data (total [i.e., across time points and collectively for all outcomes], per time point, and/or per outcome), and (xi) other quantitative or qualitative data showing feasibility and acceptability of the study protocol.

Corresponding authors were contacted two times by email to obtain missing data or clarification, if necessary. Data unavailable or unclear despite the authors responding or when authors were unresponsive after two contact attempts were marked as "not available" (NA) or unclear (?), respectively. When multiple articles were published from a single study, only data from the first published article containing a flow chart were extracted; more recent parent articles were checked to adjust or add additional data if unavailable or unclear in the earlier article. For articles that included a follow-up phase, data were extracted separately for the intervention (i.e., from recruitment to completion of post-intervention assessment) and follow-up phases (i.e., from post-intervention assessment to the end of the study) to allow for easier comparison between studies without follow-up.

2.6 | Quality assessment

As in Bellicha et al.'s review,⁹ the quality of included articles was assessed using the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute quality assessment tool for controlled intervention studies.²⁶ Two reviewers (ABe and ABa) completed this task. Study quality was defined as good, fair, or poor when 0, 1, or ≥ 2 fatal flaws (i.e., non-randomized study; dropout rate $>20\%$; no intention-to-treat analyses) were identified by both reviewers. Disagreements were discussed between reviewers.

2.7 | Feasibility and acceptability data analysis

Feasibility and acceptability data pertaining to the exercise intervention and controlled trial methods were used to calculate several rates/indicators for the intervention phase and for the follow-up phase (where applicable). Table 1 presents the calculations performed according to data extracted from the flow chart and from data in each article.

2.8 | Statistical analysis

Data were grouped together to provide a tabular summary for narrative synthesis of the included articles, and where possible, quantitative data were pooled for statistical analyses.

¹For the purpose of this review, the reason "lack of attendance or compliance" was not considered as a valid reason to include participants as having discontinued the intervention

²For the purpose of this review, the reason "lack of attendance or compliance" was not considered as a valid reason to include participants as lost to follow-up

TABLE 1 Feasibility and acceptability data analysis

Name	Calculation
Feasibility and acceptability of the exercise intervention	
Attendance rate (relates to session frequency), % or otherwise	Not calculated; reported by authors
Compliance rate (relates to session duration and intensity), % or otherwise	Not calculated; reported by authors
Dropout rate, %	$= 100/\text{number of participants allocated to the intervention} \times \text{number of participants who discontinued the intervention}$
Feasibility and acceptability of controlled trial methods	
Number of participants enrolled, N	$= \text{number of participants assessed for eligibility (i.e., recruited)} - \text{number of participants excluded}$
Refusal rate, %	$= 100/(\text{number of participants enrolled} + \text{number of participants who declined to participate}) \times \text{number of participants who declined to participate}$
Recruitment rate, n/month	$= \text{number of participants assessed for eligibility/recruitment duration (months)}$
Enrollment speed, n/month	$= \text{number of participants enrolled/recruitment duration (months)}$
Enrollment rate, %	$= 100/\text{number of participants assessed for eligibility} \times \text{number of participants enrolled}$
Retention rate, %	$= 100/\text{number of participants allocated to intervention} \times (\text{number of participants allocated to intervention} - \text{number of participants lost to follow-up during the intervention phase})$ For follow-up phase: $= 100/\text{number of participants at the beginning of follow-up} \times (\text{number of participants at the beginning of follow-up} - \text{number of participants lost to follow-up during the follow-up phase})$
Randomization refusal rate, %	$= 100/\text{number of participants randomized} \times \text{number of participants who refused randomization}$

Prevalence for exercise intervention attendance and compliance, dropout, refusal to participate, recruitment, enrollment, and retention rates, as well as enrollment speed were calculated using random-effect models. Prevalence estimates were computed using the recommended Freeman-Tukey double arcsine transformation,²⁷ and then the pooled estimate was back-transformed to a proportion. Heterogeneity was assessed with Cochran's Q and I^2 statistics. A low p value (i.e., $p < 0.10$) of the Q-statistic indicated that variation in the study-specific effect estimates was due to heterogeneity beyond chance. The I^2 values ranging from 0% (no observed heterogeneity) to 100% (complete heterogeneity).²⁸ The risk of publication bias was examined with funnel plots and tested using the Egger's test ($p < 0.10$ indicating a publication bias).²⁹ A trim and fill analysis was also carried out to examine the impact of missing studies by adjusting the meta-analysis to take into account the theoretically missing studies.³⁰ Regression residuals were screened to identify potential multivariate outliers using residual Cook distances.

Subgroup analyses (i.e., study quality, exercise intervention timing, and exercise intervention duration) were carried out for each prevalence estimate. However, no comparison tests were carried out. For study quality, the median (Mdn = 8) was used to form higher and lower quality studies (≤ 8 and > 8). For exercise intervention timing, timing was either before or after bariatric surgery. For exercise intervention duration, the median (Mdn = 12) was used to form shorter versus longer exercise duration (≤ 12 and > 12 weeks) after excluding one study with a very long intervention duration (i.e., 100 weeks).³¹ All analyses were performed in R 4.1 using the "metafor" package.³²

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Study selection

The 31 articles from Bellicha et al.'s review⁹ were included (covering articles published prior to January 2019), and 725 additional articles were retrieved during the database search of articles published in January 2019 onwards after removing duplicates (Supporting Information S3). Of the latter, 10 articles met selection criteria. One additional article identified during hand-searching was reviewed; it met selection criteria, yielding a total of 42 articles representing 28 unique studies for review. Thus, 28 articles^{31,33–59} were included after removing articles coming from the same study.

3.2 | Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics for each study are described in Supporting Information S4. The 28 articles included 1250 participants (range 6–220 per study) with a mean age < 40 years in 21.4% ($k = 6$) of articles (range 33.3–53.9 years).^{35,36,43,53,55,56} Most ($k = 18$, 64.3%) studies had samples comprising $\geq 75\%$ women^{33–35,37,38,40–48,50,55,57,59} and 21.4% ($k = 6$) comprised only women.^{36,39,49,52–54} Beyond providing data on age and sex/gender, 39.3% ($k = 11$) of articles reported other sociodemographic data,^{31,33,34,36,40,45,46,50,52,53,57} and 42.9% ($k = 12$) reported comorbidities prevalence.^{33,34,36,37,40,47,50,52–54,57,59} Among the 6 articles (21.4%) reporting ethnicity/race, all had samples

comprising $\geq 50\%$ White participants.^{37,38,41,42,50,57} Participants were awaiting or underwent Roux-Y gastric bypass in 32.1% ($k = 9$) of articles,^{35–37,39,46,49,51,52,54} sleeve gastrectomy in 7.1% ($k = 2$),^{47,56} either RYGB, sleeve gastrectomy, biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch, or gastric banding in 42.9% ($k = 12$)^{31,34,38,40,42–45,53,57–59}; the type of bariatric surgery was not reported in 17.9% ($k = 5$) of articles.^{33,41,47,50,55}

Baseline physical fitness and physical activity levels were reported in 60.7% ($k = 17$)^{33,34,36,38,41–44,47–50,53–55,57,58} and 28.6% ($k = 8$) of articles,^{33,34,36,38,44,45,54,57} respectively. All articles including a 6-min walking test distance ($k = 7$, 25.0%)^{33,34,36,38,41,50,58} had a mean distance ranging from 273 to 503 m and a mean $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ between 16 and 22 ml/kg/min ($k = 8$, 28.6%).^{42,47–49,53,54,57,58} Due to the variety of measures/tools, units, and variables reported, data on baseline physical activity levels could not be synthesized (see Supporting Information S4).

3.3 | Exercise intervention characteristics

Table 2 presents information on the exercise intervention and comparison groups evaluated within the 28 articles. Only data pertaining to the exercise interventions are synthesized below. A quarter ($k = 7$) of interventions were initiated before bariatric surgery^{33,34,41,42,47,50,55}; the rest ($k = 21$, 75.0%) were initiated after bariatric surgery.^{31,35–40,43–46,48,49,51–54,56–59} Most ($k = 16$, 57.1%) lasted ≤ 13 weeks (range 4–104 weeks),^{33,34,36,39,41–47,53,56–59} 89.3% ($k = 25$) were supervised exercise,^{31,33–38,40–42,44–55,57–59} and 35.7% ($k = 10$) held sessions individually.^{31,33,36,37,42–44,52,57,58} Exercise sessions were performed: in hospitals, clinics, or medical centers ($k = 10$, 35.7%),^{34,41,44,50,52–54,57–59} at home ($k = 4$, 14.3%),^{31,37,42,43} in research centers ($k = 3$, 10.7%),^{36,47,48} in community or fitness centers ($k = 3$, 10.7%),^{45,51,55} or at a facility ($k = 3$, 10.7%)^{33,40,46}; location was not specified in 17.9% ($k = 5$) of articles.^{35,38,39,49,56}

Most ($k = 19$, 67.9%) interventions initiated after bariatric surgery started during the first year after the surgery was performed,^{31,35–40,43–45,49,51–54,56–59} ranging from 0 to 36 months after bariatric surgery. Only 7.1% ($k = 2$) of interventions were initiated ≥ 2 years after bariatric surgery.^{46,48} Training consisted of endurance training ($k = 6$, 21.4%),^{36,37,42,49,50,57} resistance training ($k = 5$, 17.9%),^{39,40,45,46,54} combination of resistance and endurance training ($k = 16$, 57.1%),^{31,33–35,38,41,43,44,47,48,51–53,55,58,59} and balance training ($k = 1$, 3.6%).⁵⁶

3.4 | Feasibility and acceptability of the interventions

Table 2 presents information from articles on the feasibility and acceptability of the exercise intervention and comparison groups. Only data pertaining to the exercise interventions are synthesized below. Among the 57.1% ($k = 16$) of articles reporting on whether

there were adverse events during exercise,^{34,36–38,40,42,44–46,49,52–55,57,59} 32.1% ($k = 9$) reported none,^{37,42,44–46,52–55} 14.3% ($k = 4$) reported occasional pain, fatigue, or dyspnea,^{34,36,40,57} 7.1% ($k = 2$) reported hypoglycemia or hypotension,^{34,59} and 3.6% ($k = 1$) reported back bruise after a fall.⁴⁰

Main reasons reported for exercise intervention dropout were: lack of time (12 participants from 3 articles^{37,38,57}), work or other commitments (7 participants from 2 articles^{36,50}), lack of motivation (3 participants from 1 article⁴⁹), dislike of exercise (2 participants from 1 article³⁶), and postponed surgery or complications (2 participants from 2 articles^{44,50}).

Satisfaction with the exercise intervention was only reported in 3.6% ($k = 1$) of articles.³⁴ In this study,³⁴ all participants were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the person delivering the intervention (i.e., a kinesiologist), materials, and exercise modalities, except for one participant who was “moderately satisfied” with the evening schedule and the training location.

No meta-analysis was performed for exercise intervention compliance rate given the very small number of articles providing these data (10.7%, $k = 3$), more importantly given the varying operationalization of compliance.^{37,57,59} The pooled percentage of scheduled exercise session completed (attendance) and the exercise intervention dropout rates are presented in Table 3 and Supporting Information S5; related subgroup analysis are available in Table 3 and Supporting Information S6, S7, and S8. Briefly, no significant differences in attendance nor dropout rates were found based on studies quality, exercise intervention timing, and exercise intervention duration.

3.5 | Characteristics of the controlled trial methods

Characteristics pertaining to the methods of the controlled trials are presented in Supplemental file 10. Almost two thirds of articles (64.3%, $k = 18$) were published in the last 5 years (2017–2021), with the earliest being published in 2010.^{33,35,38–40,42–44,46–48,50–55,59} Most (67.9%, $k = 19$) were randomized controlled studies.^{31,33,34,36–41,43,44,48,50–52,54,56,57,59} Studies were conducted in Europe (35.7%, $k = 10$),^{31,40,44,47–49,51,54,55,58} North America (32.1%, $k = 9$),^{34,37–39,41,42,45,57,59} Brazil (21.4%, $k = 6$),^{35,36,46,50,52,53} and Iran or Turkey (10.7%, $k = 3$).^{33,43,56}

Study duration per participant (excluding follow-up phase) ranged from 4 to 161 weeks; the median was 18 weeks (Supplemental file 10). Only 17.9% ($k = 5$) of studies had a follow-up phase after the exercise intervention, with a duration ranging from 9 to 52 weeks.^{34,44,48,51,59} Most (85.7%, $k = 6$) studies in which the exercise intervention was delivered before bariatric surgery ($k = 7$, 100%) performed assessments before and after the intervention^{33,34,41,42,47,50,55}; the other (14.3%, $k = 1$) performed assessments before, during, and after the intervention.⁵⁵ Among the 21 (100%) studies in which the exercise intervention was

TABLE 2 Description, feasibility and acceptability of interventions delivered before and after bariatric surgery among studies included (k = 28)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Studies with intervention delivered before BS								
Funderburk 2010 ⁴¹ (USA) Aquatic exercise intervention	before BS	13 wk. Rehabilitation center	Supervised by aquatic exercise leaders	NA	Aquatic strength and endurance exercises; Ai Chi exercises for balance, core strengthening and relaxation: 2 × 60 min/ wk. + Usual care	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	NA	NA
Usual care	before BS	Hospital	Physicians	NA	Proceeding with gastric bypass surgery preparation routine.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	NA	
Baillot 2016 ³⁴ (Canada) Endurance and resistance training	3–6 months before BS	12 wk. Gym in an hospital (possibility sometimes at home)	Supervised by PA specialist + multidisciplinary team	Group (possibility sometimes individually)	Treadmill, walking circuit, arm- ergocycle, elliptical: 3 × 60 min/wk. (55–85% HRR) Resistance: 2–3 series of 12–15 reps 9 exercises with small equipment (20 min) + Usual care	Attendance: 68.4 (52.8–92.1) % of the total exercise sessions Compliance: NA	6.7% - had stomach pain followed by transportation problem	Occasional muscle or joint pain 3 hypoglycemia (one patient) during exercise sessions
Usual care	3–6 months before BS	Hospital	Multidisciplinary team	Group + individual	15 min PA and nutrition counseling meeting every 6 wk. for the first 6 months, then every 8 wk. until the surgery + voluntary group meeting	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Marcon 2017 ⁵⁰ (Brazil) Walk-simulating endurance training + lifestyle modification	before BS	19 wk. Outpatient clinic	Supervised by NA	NA	Walking-simulating leg and bilateral arm movement: 2 × 25 min/wk. (2–4 Borg RPE) CBT group therapy: 60 min/wk. + Usual care	Attendance: 78.5 ± 13.3% of the total exercise sessions Compliance: NA	22.7% - 1 surgery was anticipated - 4 were unable to attend intervention	NA
Walk-simulating endurance training	before BS	Outpatient clinic	Supervised by NA	NA	Walking-simulating leg and bilateral arm movement: 2 × 25 min/wk. (2–4 Borg RPE) + Usual care	Attendance: 80.9 ± 10.8% of the total exercise sessions Compliance: NA	0%	
Usual care	before BS	Outpatient clinic	Multidisciplinary team	Individual	Mandatory presence information meetings about the importance of changing eating habits and PA: 5 × 90 min.	Attendance: 100.0% of the information meetings Compliance: NA	0%	

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Picó-Sirvent 2019 ⁵⁵ (Spain) MICT-/HIIT-endurance and resistance training	before BS	26 wk. University sport facilities	Supervised by sport science graduates	NA	2–4 × 60 to 70 min/wk. Treadmill, ergocycle: 1–2 × MICT (60–85% HRpeak) + 2 × HIIT (60–95% VO ₂ peak)/wk. Resistance: 2 ×/wk. 1–4 series of 10–20 reps 4–7 exercises + <i>Usual care</i>	Attendance: 93.3 ± 6.5% of the total exercise sessions Compliance: NA	0%	None
<i>Usual care</i>	before BS	Hospital	NA	NA	Usual presurgical care indication.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Marc-Hernández 2019 ⁴⁷ (Spain) (HIIT-)Endurance and resistance training	3–6 months before BS	12 wk. Research center	Supervised by NA	NA	Ergocycle, arm ergometer, elliptical, and treadmill: 2 × 35–50 min continuous/wk. (60–80% HRmax) + 2 × HIIT/ wk. (60–80% VO ₂ max) Resistance: 1–4 series of 15–20 reps 4–7 exercises with machines (50–65% RPM) + <i>Usual care</i>	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	16.7% - 1 left the program	NA
<i>Usual care</i>	3–6 months before BS	Hospital	Multidisciplinary team	Individual	Psychological and nutritional counseling. Active lifestyle advice.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Gilbertson 2020 ⁴² (USA) Home walking	1 month before BS	4 wk. At home	Semi-supervised by the research team (Use of fitness and activity tracker Weekly texts, emails or phone calls)	Individual	Walking: 5 × 30 min/wk. (65– 85% HRmax) + <i>Usual care</i>	Attendance: 18.4 ± 3.0 of 20 scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	0%	None
<i>Usual care</i>	1 month before BS	Medical center	Multidisciplinary team	Individual	Nutritional instructions and meal replacement shakes.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Aman 2021 ³³ (Turkey) Core Stabilization Exercise Program	3–6 months before BS	8 wk. Facility based	Supervised by physiotherapists	Individual	2 × 50–70 min/wk. Warm-up: treadmill 10–15 min 50–60% HRmax Core Stabilization Exercise Program (strengthening, endurance and balance exercises) 1–2 series of 7–10 reps 7–12 exercises (50% RPM) + <i>Usual care</i>	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	NA

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
<i>Usual care</i>	3–6 months before BS	NA	Supervised by physiotherapists	Individual	PA and sedentary activities and daily PA diary with activities and number of steps. (motivational phone call every 2–3 wk.)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Studies with intervention delivered after BS								
Castello 2011 ³⁶ (Brazil) Interval endurance training	1 month after BS	12 wk. University laboratory	Supervised by physiotherapist	Individual	Treadmill: 3 × 60 min/wk. (50– 70% HRmax)	Attendance: 100.0% of 32 exercise sessions Compliance: NA	31.3% - 3 had trouble balancing work and training - 2 disliked exercise due to muscle or joint pain	Lower limb fatigue, mild dyspnea and mild sweating during exercise sessions
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Shah 2011 ⁵⁷ (USA) High-volume endurance training + diet intervention	≥3 months after BS	12 wk. Gym in a medical center (max. 80% at home)	Semi-supervised by investigator	Individual	Treadmill/walking and ergocycle/rowing: 5 × /wk. (60–70 VO ₂ max) Goal: expend ≥ 2000 kcal/wk. Exercise and diet-related behavioral therapy every 2 wk.	Attendance: NA Compliance: 30.0–53.0% reached the goal	23.8% - 5 did not have enough time to exercise	Occasional muscle or joint soreness
<i>Diet intervention</i>	≥3 months after BS	Research center or by telephone	Investigator	Individual	Behavioral diet-related intervention and feedback on diet every 2 wk.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	33.3% - 3 preferred to be in the exercise group - 1 had no time	
Stegen 2011 ⁵⁸ (Belgium) Progressive endurance and resistance training	1 month after BS	12 wk. University rehabilitation facilities	Supervised by movement and rehabilitation sciences master students	Individual	Cycling, walking and stepping: 3 × 75 min/wk. (60–75% HRR) Resistance: 1–3 series of 10–15 reps of knee/elbow flexion/ extension exercises using stack-weight equipment (60– 75% RPM, 25 min)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA
NA	1 month after BS	NA	NA	NA	NA	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Coen 2015 ³⁷ (USA) Endurance training	1–3 months after BS	26 wk. Research center or at home or outdoors	Semi-supervised by trained exercise physiologists (at least 1 session/ wk.)	Individual	Ergocycle, treadmill, cycling and walking outdoors: 3–5 × 10– 30 min/wk. (60–70% HRmax); Goal: expand ≥120 min/wk. + Health education	Attendance: NA Compliance: 66.7% reached the goal	9.1% - 5 had time- commitment issues - 1 was lost to follow-up	None
Health education	1–3 months after BS	NA	NA	Group	Monthly health education sessions (medication, nutrition, PA). PA habit reports.	Attendance: NA Compliance: 90.3% reported > 30 min PA/wk.	4.8% - 1 moved away - 1 was lost to follow-up - 1 pregnancy	None
Huck 2015 ⁴⁵ (USA) Multifaceted resistance training	1–12 months after BS	12 wk. Community- based training facility	Supervised by certified strength and conditioning specialist	Group	Resistance: 1–3 series of 8–12 reps 8–10 exercises with stack-weight equipment, free weights, resistive bands and body weight. 2–3 × 60 min/wk. (60–75% RPM) + Usual care	Attendance: 84.0% of training sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	None
Usual care	1–12 months after BS	NA	Clinicians	NA	Encouragement to increase PA and consume protein shakes.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Marchesi 2015 ⁴⁹ (Italy) Road running training	12–36 months after BS	44 wk. NA	Supervised by sport physician (1 self-managed session/wk in the last 20 wk.)	NA	Indoor or outdoor road running: 3–4 × 60 min/wk.; goal: participation in a 10.5 km competitive run (55–90% HRmax) Physiological assistance and specialized nutritional counseling.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	30.0% - 3 lacked motivation	Symptomatic cholelithiasis (resolved after 3-wk break)
NA	12–13 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	NA	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Muschitz 2016 ³¹ (Austria) Endurance and resistance training + + specific supplementation	2 wk. after BS	104 wk. At home	Semi-supervised Monitored by physical medicine experts	Individual	Nordic walking: at least 3 × 45 min/wk. Resistance perseverance and equipment training: at least 2 × 30 min/wk. Specific vitamin, mineral and protein supplementation before BS and after BS. + Usual care	Attendance: 88.2% completed ≥80% exercise requirements Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
<i>Usual care</i>	2 wk. after BS	NA	Telephone interviews	NA	Advice on PA and balanced nutrition. Basic supplementation.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	14.5% - 12 were unwilling to stay in the study - 4 got new jobs outside the area	
Rojhani-Shirazi 2016 ⁵⁶ (Iran) Balance training	5 days after BS	4 wk. NA	NA	NA	Balance training with periodic exercises (e.g., standing one leg or walking on toes): 4 × 45 min/wk.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	NA	NA
NA	after BS	NA	NA	NA	NA	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	NA	
Campanha-Versiani 2017 ³⁵ (Brazil) Endurance and resistance training	3 months after BS	36 wk. NA	Supervised by NA	NA	Treadmill: 2 × 25 min/wk. (70– 80% HRmax) Resistance: 1–3 series of 10–12 reps at 10RM maximum load 8 exercises (2 × 60 min/wk.) + Usual care	Attendance: 60.0% attended ≥95% scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA
<i>Usual care</i>	3 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	Dietary counseling, Multivitamin and mineral supplementation.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Coleman 2017 ³⁸ (USA) Functional resistance training	6–24 months after BS	52 wk. NA	Semi-supervised by NA (60% self-directed exercise)	Group + Individual	Functional resistance, aerobic and flexibility training with body weight: 2 × 60 min/wk. Self-directed exercise 3×/wk. Goal: MVPA ≥150 min/wk. Weekly phone counseling. Step counting. + maintenance phase with booster exercise sessions and social support	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA 32.0–56.0% of the supervised exercise sessions Compliance: NA	7.7% - 2 lacked of time	-44% with initial functionality developed condition during intervention
<i>Usual care</i>	6–24 months after BS	Hospital	Nurse care managers	Individual	Dietary and PA counseling 2 wk., 2 months and 6 months after surgery.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Herring 2017 ⁴⁴ (UK) Endurance and resistance training	12–24 months after BS	12 wk. Outpatient clinic	Supervised by qualified gym instructor	Individual	3 × 60 min/wk. Endurance: 64–77% HRmax, 12–14 Borg RPE Resistance: 3 series of 12 reps 2 exercises (60% RPM, 25 min) Diet information	Attendance: 95.0% of 36 scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	8.3% - 1 had gastric band deflated	None

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
<i>Usual care</i>	12–24 months after BS	NA	NA	Individual	Advice session of 30–60 min on PA upon study discharge and diet information.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	16.7% - 2 preferred to be in the exercise group	
Onofre 2017 ⁵³ (Brazil) <i>Endurance and resistance training</i>	3 months after BS	12 wk. University hospital	Supervised by physiotherapist	NA	Treadmill: 3 × 60 min/wk. (40– 60% HRR and 85–90% HRR) Resistance: upper and lower limb exercises (60–80% RPM, 25 min)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	None
<i>Usual care</i>	3 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	General guidelines for the importance of PA	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Daniels 2018 ³⁹ (USA) <i>Progressive resistance training</i>	2 months after BS	12 wk. NA	NA	NA	Resistance: 1–4 series of 8–15 reps on 8–10 exercises, 3 × 60–80 min/wk. (50–>80% RPM)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	NA
<i>Control</i>	2 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	Instruction to continue normal daily activities.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Hassannejad 2017 ⁴³ (Iran) <i>Endurance training + resistance training</i>	Just after BS	12 wk. At home	No supervision Daily activity log books	Individual	Resistance: Shoulder and hip exercises with elastic bands, 3 × 20–30 min/wk. Walking: 3–5 × 20–30 min/wk. (12–14 Borg RPE)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA
<i>Endurance training</i>	Just after BS	At home	No supervision Daily activity log books	Individual	Walking: 3–5 × 20–30 min/wk. (12–14 Borg RPE)	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA
<i>Diet education</i>	Just after BS	NA	Nutritionist	Individual	Education about standard high- protein diet after BS.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Mundbjerg 2018 ⁵¹ (Denmark) <i>Endurance and resistance physical training</i>	6 months after BS	26 wk. Fitness center	Supervised by physiologists (additional individual sessions)	NA	2 × 40 min/wk Ergocycle, stair climbing, treadmill, rowing (2 × 30 min, 50–70% VO ₂ max/15–17 Borg RPE) Resistance: upper extremities (2 × 10 min) goal: PA ≥ 210 min/wk. + Usual care	Attendance: 59.4% attended ≥50% scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA
<i>Usual care</i>	6 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	Standard dietary recommendations.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Oppert 2018 ⁵⁴ (France) Resistance training + protein	6 wk. after BS	18 wk. University hospital	Supervised by qualified trainers	Group	Resistance: 4 series of 8–12 reps 6 exercises, 3 × 60 min/wk. (50– 75% RPM) When protein supplementation, 2 × per day + Usual care	Attendance: 47.8% completed ≥2 exercise sessions/ wk. and nutritional requirements Compliance: NA	0%	None
Usual care + protein	1 wk. after BS	NA	No supervision	Individual	When protein supplementation, 2 × per day. + Usual care	Attendance: 45.2% completed all visits and nutritional requirements Compliance: NA	0%	
Usual care	Before BS	NA	NA	Individual	Nutrition and PA advice. Prescription of iron, multivitamin and mineral supplementation from 15 days before BS.	Attendance: 100.0% of scheduled visits Compliance: NA	0%	
Murai 2019 ⁵² (Brazil) Endurance and resistance training	3 months after BS	26 wk. Hospital	Supervised by NA	Individual	Treadmill: 3 × 60–90 min/wk. (50% VAT-RCP) Resistance: 3 series of 8–12 reps on 7 exercises + Health education	Attendance: NA 81.5 ± 13.1% of total exercise sessions Compliance: NA	0%	None
Health education	3 months after BS	NA	NA	NA	Advice on calcium, vitamin D3 and protein intake. Encouraged to improve PA levels during follow-up	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	0%	
Diniz-Souza 2021 ⁴⁰ (Portugal) Multicomponent resistance training + Usual care	1 month after BS	47 wk. Facility based	Supervised by exercise trainer	Group	High-impact training: High ground-reaction force exercises (183–209 gravitational loading peaks > 4.9 g, 20 min) Resistance training: 2–3 series of 4–12 reps 7–8 exercises (65–85% RPM, 35 min) 3 × 75 min/wk. + Usual care	Attendance: 39.0% attended ≥50% scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	- 10 required ad hoc exercise program adjustment (4 knee pain, 2 lower back pain, 1 diffuse lower limbs pain) and temporarily interrupted the intervention (1 rolled ankle and 1

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Usual care	1 month after BS	NA	NA	Individual	Prescription of proton-pump inhibitors and structured PA. Supplementation advice.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	hand bruise outside the study, 1 back bruise after fall in exercise session)
Tardif 2020 ⁵⁹ (Canada) Moderate endurance and resistance training	3 months after BS	12 wk. Medical center	Supervised by NA	NA	Moderate endurance training (50–75% HRR) and resistance training (25 min): 3 × 60 min/ wk.	Attendance: 28.0% attended 85% scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: 100%	0%	11% hypotension
NA	3 months after BS	NA	NA	NA		Attendance: NA Compliance: 100%	0%	
Marc-Hernández 2020 ⁴⁸ (Spain) ACT- and HIIT-endurance and resistance training	37 months after BS	20 wk. Sport Research Center	Supervised by sports science graduates	NA	Ergocycle, elliptical, treadmill: ACT (60–85% HRmax.) and HIIT (60–95% VO ₂ max), 2– 4 × 50 min/wk. Resistance: 1–4 series of 4–7 reps 4–7 exercises (50–75% RPM, 8– 28 min)	Attendance: 90.9% attended ≥ 85% scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	0%	NA
Usual care	37 months after BS	Hospital	NA	NA		Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	20.0% - 2 refused to continue	
Lamarca 2021 ⁴⁶ (Brazil) Resistance training + protein	2–7 years after BS	12 wk. Facility based	Supervised by qualified professionals	NA	Resistance: 3 series of 8–12 reps on 8 exercises, 3 × 80 min/wk. (6–9 on OMNI-RES) Whey protein supplementation and general training on healthy eating.	Attendance: 80.0 ± 7.7% of scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	None
Resistance training + placebo	2–7 years after BS	Facility based	Supervised by qualified professionals	NA	Resistance: 3 series of 8–12 reps on 8 exercises, 3 × 80 min/wk. (6–9 on OMNI-RES) Placebo Maltodextrin and general training on healthy eating	Attendance: 84.8 ± 5.4% of scheduled exercise sessions Compliance: NA	Not clear	NA

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author year (country) Brief intervention name	Intervention starting time	Intervention length Setting	Intervention supervision	Intervention format	Intervention description Exercise type and volume ^a	Attendance and compliance rate	Dropout rate ^b Reasons	Adverse events during exercise
Protein	2–7 years after BS	At home	No supervision	Individual	Whey protein supplementation and general training on healthy eating.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	
Placebo	2–7 years after BS	At home	No supervision	Individual	Placebo Maltodextrin and general training on healthy eating.	Attendance: NA Compliance: NA	Not clear	

Note: Data are presented as mean $\pm$ SD or median (25th–75th percentiles).

Abbreviations: ACT, aerobic continuous training; BS, bariatric surgery; HIIT, high-intensity interval training; HR, heart rate; HRR, heart rate reserve; PA, physical activity; NA, not available; OMNI-RES, OMNI-Resistance Exercise Scale; reps, repetitions; RPE, rating of perceived exertion; RPM, one repetition maximum; VAT-RCP, difference between ventilator anaerobic threshold and respiratory compensation point; wk., week(s).

^aSession duration included warm-up and cool down duration.

^bDrop out rate = % of participants who discontinued intervention.

delivered after bariatric surgery, 33.3% ($k = 7$),^{31,36,39,40,43,56,58} 38.1% ($k = 8$),^{37,38,44–46,48,49,57} and 28.6% ($k = 6$)^{35,51–54,59} performed baseline assessments before bariatric surgery, before the exercise intervention (i.e., after bariatric surgery), or at both these times, respectively. The number of assessments (excluding the follow-up phase) ranged from 2 to 9, with 17.9% ($k = 5$) having ≥ 3 assessments.^{31,35,40,48,54}

3.6 | Feasibility and acceptability of the controlled trial methods

Data pertaining to the feasibility and acceptability of the controlled trial methods are presented in Supplemental file 10. Among the 46.4% ($k = 13$) of articles reporting recruitment duration,^{33,34,36,37,40,42–44,51,54,59} the median duration was 24 months (ranged from 6 to 56 months). Recruitment strategies were reported in most (60.7%, $k = 17$) articles,^{33,34,36,38,39,41–50,54,55} among these, active, passive, or mixed approaches were used in 70.6% ($k = 12$),^{33,36,38,41,43,44,47–50,54,55} 17.6% ($k = 3$),^{39,45,46} and 11.8% ($k = 2$)^{34,42} studies, respectively. For studies in which the exercise intervention was delivered after bariatric surgery, 66.7% ($k = 14$) recruited participant before bariatric surgery.^{31,35,36,39,40,43,48,51–54,56,58,59}

The reasons for lost to follow-up for the exercise groups were: lack of time and commitment issues (21 participants from 6 articles),^{36,37,40,49,57,58} surgery-related issues (14 participants from 5 articles),^{34,35,50,52,59} and unreachable (9 participants from 2 articles) (Supplemental file 10).^{38,40}

Among the 28 articles, 17.9% ($k = 5$)^{34,40,42,52,54} reported some missing data by outcomes and/or time-points, and 10.7% ($k = 3$)^{37,44,51} described the method used to handle missing data.

Pooled data for refusal to participate, recruitment, enrollment, and retention rates, and enrollment speed are presented in Table 3 and Supporting Information S5. Related subgroup analyses are available in Table 3 and Supporting Information S6, S7, and S8; no significant differences were found based on study quality, exercise intervention timing, and exercise intervention duration. Randomization refusal rate was not pooled due to the high number of randomized controlled trials without dropout because of dissatisfaction with group allocation ($k = 14$). Only 4 studies ($n = 8$ participants across all the studies) reported to have participants dissatisfied to be randomized in the control group.^{34,44,57,59}

3.7 | Studies quality

Study quality was rated as good, fair, and poor for 28.6% ($k = 8$),^{34,37–39,44,51,52,54} 35.7% ($k = 10$),^{31,33,40,41,43,45,48,50,53,57} and 35.7% ($k = 10$) of articles,^{35,36,42,46,47,49,55,56,58,59} respectively (Supporting Information S9). Informing these scores is that most (67.9%, $k = 19$) articles presented a randomized study,^{31,33,34,36–41,43,44,48,50–52,54,56,57,59} 46.4% ($k = 13$) reported a dropout rate $< 20\%$,^{31,33,34,37–39,43–45,48,51,53,54} and 53.6% ($k = 15$) reported intention-to-treat

TABLE 3 Pooled percentage of feasibility and acceptability indicators of exercise and controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery

	Arm numbers	%	95% CI		I ²
Feasibility and acceptability data					
Total attendance rate – exercise intervention	10	84.3	77.0	90.7	0.0
Study quality:					
High	6	83.9	70.6	94.1	9.4
Low	4	84.2	80.1	88.0	0.0
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	4	79.4	67.7	89.4	0.0
After BS	6	87.4	76.7	95.6	0.0
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	4	82.2	78.5	85.6	0.0
Shorter	6	86.8	71.4	97.6	27.0
Total compliance rate – exercise intervention	3	No meta-analysis performed			
Total dropout rate (%) – exercise intervention	19	5.0	1.1	10.5	60.1
Study quality:					
High	11	5.1	0.6	12.4	61.6
Low	8	5.5	0.0	18.4	58.7
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	7	3.6	0.0	14.6	44.4
After BS	12	5.6	0.6	13.8	68.5
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	9	3.7	0.0	12.6	64.7
Shorter	10	6.2	0.5	15.8	56.3
Total dropout rate (%) control/comparison groups	18	1.6	0.0	5.3	53.2
Study quality:					
High	11	2.2	0.0	7.1	60.5
Low	7	1.9	0.0	13.3	41.4
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	4	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
After BS	14	2.8	0.0	8.2	62.3
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	9	0.0	0.0	2.4	6.7
Shorter	8	2.9	0.0	13.1	48.3
Feasibility and acceptability of controlled trial methods					
Total refusal rate (%)	16	22.6	10.0	38.2	94.6
Study quality:					
High	10	22.7	10.4	38.0	89.5
Low	6	22.9	0.0	69.2	97.5
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	4	30.7	0.0	81.0	91.7
After BS	12	20.3	6.5	38.7	95.3
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	7	27.2	3.6	60.3	96.8
Shorter	9	18.9	4.7	38.7	91.0

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Arm numbers	%	95% CI		I ²
Total recruitment rate (n/month)	12	7.1	3.8	11.3	60.1
Study quality:					
High	8	6.3	3.8	9.2	0.0
Low	4	10.2	0.1	29.4	81.3
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	3	8.1	0.7	20.2	0.0
After BS	9	7.0	2.9	12.4	70.4
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	4	7.9	0.0	25.6	85.3
Shorter	8	6.5	3.3	10.5	15.7
Total enrollment speed (n/month)	13	2.5	1.4	3.7	0.0
Study quality:					
High	9	2.5	1.3	4.0	0.0
Low	4	2.8	0.3	6.8	0.0
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	3	1.1	0.0	6.2	0.0
After BS	10	2.9	1.6	4.4	0.0
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	5	1.6	0.6	2.9	0.0
Shorter	8	3.3	1.4	5.6	0.0
Total enrollment rate (%)	18	43.3	30.0	57.2	93.6
Study quality:					
High	12	40.0	26.1	54.7	90.7
Low	6	50.1	14.0	86.1	96.4
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	4	17.4	0.4	46.5	74.7
After BS	14	50.8	36.4	65.2	93.1
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	9	38.1	17.1	61.4	95.7
Shorter	9	49.0	29.7	68.5	89.1
Total retention rate (%) – exercise intervention	26	87.1	79.6	93.3	79.5
Study quality:					
High	13	92.9	84.4	98.6	78.7
Low	13	77.2	65.7	87.3	61.3
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	7	96.4	84.6	100	49.5
After BS	19	83.6	74.1	91.5	82.8
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	12	86.8	75.5	95.5	77.1
Shorter	13	84.3	72.1	93.9	70.8
Total retention rate (%) – control/comparison groups	26	86.8	80.6	92.1	65.5
Study quality:					
High	13	88.9	81.2	95.1	67.7
Low	13	82.8	71.7	92.0	50.7

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Arm numbers	%	95% CI		I ²
Exercise intervention timing:					
Before BS	6	89.5	77.8	97.8	0.0
After BS	20	85.7	78.1	92.1	72.9
Exercise intervention duration:					
Longer	12	90.4	62.8	95.7	75.1
Shorter	13	81.7	72.5	89.6	32.0

Note: Study quality and intervention duration subgroup analyses are based on median; studies considered high quality = score >8/14 and low quality = score ≤8/14; longer intervention duration = >12 weeks excluding studies with >100 weeks of intervention duration and shorter duration ≤12 weeks. Randomization refusal rate (%) was not pooled due to the high number of 0 among studies (only four studies including eight participants who refused randomization).

Abbreviation: BS, bariatric surgery.

analyses.^{34,37–41,44,45,47,50–54,57} A third or less of articles reported blinding for outcomes (10.7%, $k=3$)^{33,37,50} and treatment assignment (0%, $k=0$), “high attendance rate” (i.e., participation to exercise training sessions ≥70% or proportion of completers ≥70%) ($k=10$, 35.7%),^{31,36,42,44–46,48,50,52,55} and sample size justification (35.7%, $k=10$).^{33,36,40,43,44,46,48,51,52,54}

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 | Summary of evidence

Systematic reviews have summarized evidence on the effects of exercise intervention before and after bariatric surgery.^{9–11,13–20} To complement these reviews and make recommendations for practice and future research, the present systematic review summarized evidence on the acceptability and feasibility of exercise interventions and controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery.

Overall, available data from 28 articles reviewed show that exercise intervention compliance is very seldom reported (10.7%, $k=3$), the mean rate for exercise intervention attendance is 84% (based on data available from 28.6% [$k=8$] of articles), and the mean exercise intervention dropout rate is 5% (based on data available from 64.3% [$k=18$] of articles). In addition, most adverse events reported noted in the 57.1% ($k=16$) were relatively minor. Collectively, these indicators suggest that exercise interventions can be feasible and acceptable before and after bariatric surgery, but the relative lack of data available prevents us from making firm conclusions.

Although no consensus exists, attending ≥70% of sessions is often mentioned as “high” for exercise intervention.⁶⁰ With a pooled mean of 84% [95% CI: 77–91%] of sessions completed, the attendance rate calculated could be considered as high, which is important because attendance rate can impact study results.^{60,61} This rate is broadly similar to reported rates for people with type 2 diabetes (68–100%)⁶² and cancer (70–98%).⁶³ However, these findings must be interpreted with caution. Session attendance was not reported in 39.3% ($k=11$) of included articles (see Table 2),

which could overestimate the calculated pooled attendance rate mean, especially if studies with lower attendance were less likely to report these data. As well, session attendance was calculated/ reported differently across articles (e.g., % of participants who attended *all* exercise sessions, % of participants who attended a *certain number* of exercise sessions). In addition, exercise intervention attendance rate, which relates to frequency, is only one aspect of exercise intervention adherence. Suppose two participants attended all scheduled sessions (100% attendance), but only one completed the prescribed 30-minute aerobic training at moderate intensity. Focusing solely on attendance can be very misleading if suitable attention is not also given to compliance to the prescribed exercise dosage, which relates to duration and intensity.²⁴ Authors should give more attention to collecting and reporting data that reflect several key characteristics relating to exercise intervention adherence for transparency and help (potentially) explain lack of efficacy of exercise training.⁶¹

Across 19 exercise groups, the exercise intervention dropout rate was 5%, which is lower than rates observed in adults with depression (15%),⁶⁴ type 2 diabetes (<20%),⁶² and advanced cancer (24%).⁶⁵ The lower rate herein could be explained by the population. Speculatively, adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery may be highly motivated to exercise because of their fear of regaining weight and/or because they receive support via regular medical and nutritional follow-ups. The lower rate could also be explained by the small number of articles that reported this information (64.3%, $k=18$), whereby those with higher dropout rate may not have reported these data. Last, it could be because we considered exercise intervention dropout only (not study or follow-up dropout). In other words, participants who completed the intervention, but did not come to the last assessment were not considered in the calculation of the exercise intervention dropout rate. Nevertheless, lack of time, work or other commitments, and lack of motivation were among the main reasons for exercise dropout among the 32.1% ($k=9$) articles reporting reasons when they had dropouts. These reasons reflect key barriers to physical activity in adults with and without obesity,^{66–69} and underscore the need to develop strategies to enhance motivation and perhaps offer alternative means for those lacking time or with competing commitments

(e.g., online interventions) to reduce dropout and maximize intervention success.

Concerning feasibility and acceptability of controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery, results suggest several months (median 24 months [range 6–56 months]) are required to recruit 6 to 220 participants (based on the 46.4% [$k = 13$] articles reporting these data). With a pooled mean of 7 participants assessed for eligibility per month (23% of refusal to participate rate) and 2.5 participants enrolled per month, the pooled enrollment rate was 43%. Recruitment is one of the most challenging steps in research with clinical populations, requiring significant commitment from staff and resources to reach target sample size.²⁵ As adverse scientific, economic, and ethical impacts can occur with prolonged or inefficient recruitment,^{70,71} multicenter recruitment, patient involvement, and hiring of qualified staff should be considered to optimize recruitment. As well, recruitment strategies should be chosen carefully during the planning phase and reported during the dissemination phase to help others evaluate whether strategies used were effective.²⁵ Based on available data reported, active recruitment strategies were used most (70.6%, $k = 12$), followed by passive strategies alone (17.6%, $k = 3$), and a mix of active and passive strategies (11.8%, $k = 2$). Active methods of recruitment seem to result in better recruitment, population representativity, and retention than passive methods, but these are more expensive.⁷² This said, the recruitment process was often poorly described or not described at all (39.3%, $k = 11$), making it impossible to determine the most cost-effectiveness strategy/ies for recruiting adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery into exercise trials. Regardless, integrating clinical staff can be helpful for recruitment within the scheduled time frame in bariatric surgery studies⁷³; so effective partnerships should be created.

Retention rates for the exercise intervention (87% [95% CI: 80–93%]; $k = 26$) and comparison groups (87% [95% CI: 81–92%]; $k = 26$), as well as randomization refusal rate (only 8 participants across 4 studies) were good, suggesting the employed methods in the controlled trial methods were feasible and acceptable to participants. There is consensus that retention rates $\geq 80\%$ are “acceptable” and that such rates help to minimize internal, external, and statistical validity threats.⁷⁴ The good pooled retention rate could be explained by the short study duration for participants (median 18 weeks) and small number of assessments (2 or 3 assessments), which are known factors affecting retention.⁷⁵ On the other hand, having supervised exercise sessions (89.3%, $k = 25$) required frequent in-person visits, which could have affected enrollment in the first place (i.e., before the intervention/study has started), whereby those who foresaw barriers related to the intervention/study could have refused to participate, resulting in selection bias but good retention rates. This is a serious problem because many adults who might profit from an exercise intervention may not be included in controlled trials. It is important that we know more about the causes of non-participation and study dropout, regardless of rates, so as to enable reliable evaluations of exercise interventions and generalization of the results. Thus, authors should provide information about participants versus non-participants, as well as completers and non-completers. As for retention strategies,

some guidance is available from the Longitudinal Assessment of Bariatric Surgery study⁷⁶ and the Behavior Change Consortium.⁷⁷ Potential strategies include flexible schedule, incentives reimbursements, shortening visit length and number, coupling medical to research visits, and participant bonding or identification with the study, though it remains to be seen which strategy (or strategies) is most effective.

To explore factors influencing feasibility and acceptability indicators, as well as heterogeneity, subgroup analyses were performed; no significant differences were noted based on study quality, exercise intervention timing, and intervention duration. The absence of significant differences could be explained by the lack of statistical power herein since subgroup analyses require many more included studies than are needed for the main analyses of the meta-analysis.⁷⁸ The number of sub analysis initially planned (population, intervention and methodology-related characteristics) for this meta-analysis was greatly reduced due to the small number of studies and data available.

4.2 | Strengths and limitations of this review

The systematic analysis of the peer-reviewed literature is the main strength of this review. Indeed, the articles identified were the result of an extensive search in different databases, and screening and data extraction were conducted by multiple reviewers to minimize bias. However, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, this review contains articles stemming from controlled trials published in peer-reviewed journals with full-texts available in English only. Second, the characteristics of the included articles limits the ability to generalize results. For example, 68% ($k = 19$) of studies were completed in higher income countries, and sociodemographic data were missing in 68% ($k = 19$) of articles. Moreover, men were largely underrepresented. Third, studies were not necessarily designed to explore the feasibility or acceptability of an exercise intervention and/or controlled trial methods, limiting collection of (or reporting) of some data relating to feasibility and acceptability (e.g., satisfaction rate). Fourth, data extraction and interpretation were challenging due to the absence of clear definitions and a lack of consensus on the concepts of “feasibility” and “acceptability,” though the CONSORT flow chart presented in most (60.7%, $k = 17$) articles aided. Finally, publication bias could also affect the findings.

4.3 | Recommendations for exercise intervention implementation, research, and reporting

When interpreting exercise intervention adherence and dropout rates in bariatric surgery population, persons planning to implement exercise interventions should keep in mind the impact of selection bias across included studies due to voluntary basis recruitment and specific selection criteria leading to probable over estimation of the adherence rate and under estimation of the dropout rate.⁶⁰ Based on the voluntary basis, and selection criteria of some studies, it is likely

that adults who had a higher disease burden, poorer functional status and motivation were not included, providing only a partial view of what happens in real life conditions; these trials may not address the feasibility and acceptability of exercise for a subgroup of adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery. Researchers are encouraged to include these adults to examine the effects (as well as the adverse effects) that may result. Relatedly, the lack of data on non-participants raises the possibility that issues of feasibility and acceptability may come about even before participants enroll into trials. Thus, researchers will need to consider how possible differences are likely to impact on the results, as this will influence the certainty of evidence. In addition, the acceptability and feasibility of exercise training in people awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery may be affected by type of exercise; yet, there was limited variety across studies. Many studies focused on walk, treadmill, or ergocycle (for endurance/aerobic training) or machines or small equipment (for resistance training). Only one study focused on running after bariatric surgery⁴⁹ and another on aquatic training before bariatric surgery.⁴¹ Further investigation into the feasibility and acceptability of different type of exercise is warranted, and whether it matters if it is the researchers who chose the type of exercise or the participants. Because patient-oriented strategies can increase participation and adherence as patients feel included in their decisions,^{79–82} and because adults mostly get to choose their own type of exercise in real life, examining whether integrating participants' preferences into interventions improves feasibility and acceptability seems valuable. Also, to reach larger proportion of bariatric surgery patients, several modalities of intervention (e.g. in person, telehealth, individual or group) and setting (hospital, community) should be considered for implementation. Last, based on identified gaps, future studies are necessary to draw conclusions regarding the feasibility and acceptability of multicentric study, long-term data collection (follow-up period after the intervention), exercise intervention in male and visible minorities.

As more research is conducted, the most critical points to address in included articles are the clarity and transparency in reporting feasibility and acceptability data. Unfortunately, the reason of missing feasibility and acceptability data in the included articles cannot be determined by the authors (e.g., data not collected, limited number of words in the article or not relevant for the investigators of included articles). The major recommendation coming out of this review is that future studies should report consistently these data to better identify which exercise intervention offer the most promising results in terms of efficacy and implementation. The systematic use of the PRISMA flow chart could help in this direction. To increase transparency, researchers should too describe missing data by outcome, by time-point and by group (number and reason), and how missing data were handled.⁸³ Also, previous and future trials should systematically share their raw data. It facilitates the development of individual patient data meta-analysis (in exercise, e.g., see Bernard et al.⁸⁴). This method is particularly recommended to study moderators of intervention effects.⁸⁵ For instance, it allows to disentangle subject-level and study-level sources of heterogeneity in adherence rates. Better

reports of feasibility and acceptability data could also help future meta-analysis to identify factors associated with better adherence, recruitment, enrollment and retention.

5 | CONCLUSION

Despite the present lack of data available in controlled trials included, exercise intervention and controlled trial methods in adults awaiting or having undergone bariatric surgery seem to be feasible and acceptable, though there is room for improvement. To improve evidence-based knowledge, identify methodological and practical challenges and bias, better reporting of adherence, dropout, adverse events, recruitment, enrollment, retention data, and strategies used are needed in future controlled trials. This should help implement exercise training protocols in real life conditions that will be specifically adapted to clinical care in the setting of bariatric surgery.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

None declared.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest statement.

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How to cite this article: Baillot A, St-Pierre M, Bernard P, et al. Exercise and bariatric surgery: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the feasibility and acceptability of exercise and controlled trial methods. *Obesity Reviews.* 2022;23(9):e13480. doi:[10.1111/obr.13480](https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.13480)