

Occupational Therapy Pre-discharge Planning and Home Assessments for Older Adults: A Systematic Review

Jewel Aguinaldo, Katherine Hamill, Brandon Kuehnhold, Robert Goya-Smith
Hawai'i Pacific University, Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Research Question

Do pre-discharge home assessments conducted by occupational therapists improve home safety and facilitate smoother transitions from acute to home for older adults?

Introduction

The transition from acute care to home is a vulnerable period for older adults. Functional limitations, environmental barriers increase the risk of falls and loss of independence. Occupational therapy pre-discharge home assessments identify safety risks, recommend modifications, and support safe community reintegration.

Objective:

- To identify, evaluate, and synthesize the current literature concerning the effectiveness of occupational therapy–led pre-discharge home assessments for older adults transitioning from acute care to home.

Method

Review Process: Followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.

Date of Search : May 19, 2026, Additional article added May 26, 2026

Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed studies on occupational therapy pre-discharge home assessments and discharge planning for older adults published between 01/01/2021 and 12/31/2026

Search Terms used: occupational therapy, or occupational therapist, or occupational therapists, or ot AND acute care geriatrics, or older adults, or elderly, AND discharge planning, or discharge process, or discharge management AND acute occupational therapy, or occupational therapist, or ot

Exclusion criteria: Systematic reviews, dissertations, conference proceedings, and non-peer-reviewed literature

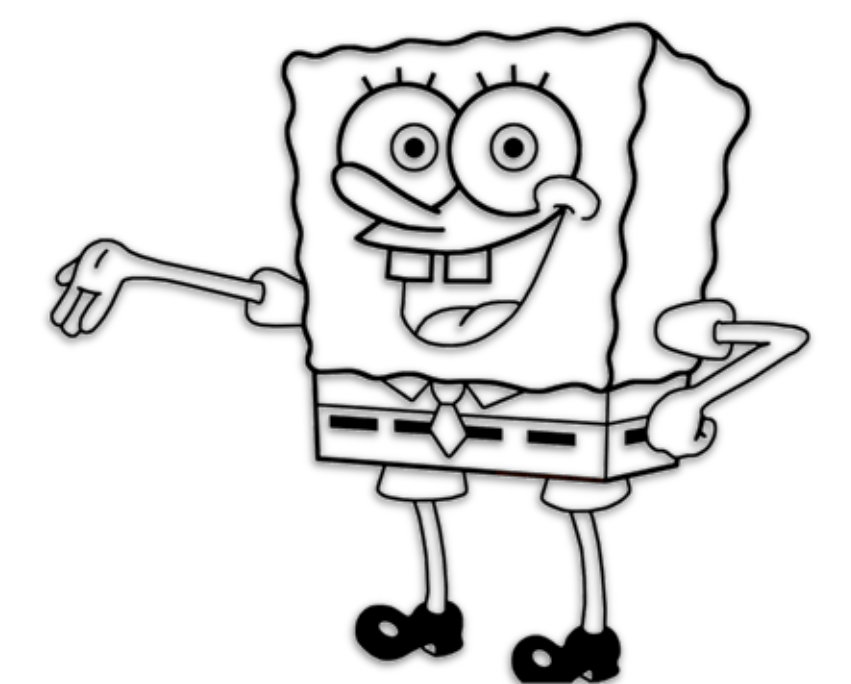
References

Figure 1. *Occupational Therapists Improve Home Safety*

OT HOME SAFETY EVALUATION



Image Source ChatGPT



Results

Four studies were included in the systematic review. One study provided direct support for pre-discharge home visits, indicating potential cost effectiveness and reductions in falls and hospital readmissions. The remaining studies focused on discharge planning processes, decision-making tools, and interprofessional communication, offering only tangential relevance to the primary research question. The limited number of studies addressing pre-discharge home visits directly restricts the strength of conclusions that can be drawn.

Discussion

Effective communication was identified as an important factor in intervention selection and discharge planning. The evidence suggests that multidisciplinary discharge planning combined with a pre-discharge home assessment may improve patient outcomes and provide additional benefits following hospital discharge. Future high-quality studies should examine the effects of occupational therapy home safety evaluations on safety, readmissions, function, and healthcare utilization across diverse populations and settings.

Conclusion

Older adults represent a growing proportion of individuals discharged from acute care settings, and this population is particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes during the transition from hospital to home. As depicted in Figure 1, pre-discharge home assessments conducted by occupational therapists improve home safety and facilitate smoother transitions from acute to home for older adults.

