

# ASSESSING FITNESS TO WORK AMONG OLDER WORKERS: LITERATURE REVIEW

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## Background

- Decreases in physical and mental functional ability due to aging can impair work capacity, productivity and fitness for work among older workers.
- Our objective was to summarize current situation in assessing fitness to work of older workers from data available in recent literature.

## Material & Methods

- Literature review has been made in PubMed database regarding following key words: ageing worker; fitness to work; functional capacity; work ability.
- We focused our search for time period of past 20 years.

## Results

- Only five publications satisfied are inclusion criteria:

1. Crimmins, E. M., S. L. Reynolds, and Y. Saito. 1999. 'Trends in health and ability to work among the older working-age population', *J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci*, 54: S31-40.
2. Gommans, F. G., N. W. Jansen, M. G. Mackey, D. Stynen, A. de Grip, and I. J. Kant. 2016. 'The Impact of Physical Work Demands on Need for Recovery, Employment Status, Retirement Intentions, and Ability to Extend Working Careers: A Longitudinal Study Among Older Workers', *J Occup Environ Med*, 58: e140-51.
3. Johnson, R. W., G. B. Mermin, and M. Resseger. 2011. 'Job demands and work ability at older ages', *J Aging Soc Policy*, 23: 101-18.
4. Leijten, F. R., S. G. van den Heuvel, J. F. Ybema, A. J. van der Beek, S. J. Robroek, and A. Burdorf. 2014. 'The influence of chronic health problems on work ability and productivity at work: a longitudinal study among older employees', *Scand J Work Environ Health*, 40: 473-82.
5. Padula, R. S., M. L. Comper, S. A. Moraes, C. Sabbagh, W. J. Pagliato, and M. R. Perracini. 2013. 'The work ability index and functional capacity among older workers', *Braz J Phys Ther*, 17: 382-91.

- All studies agreed that long-term health issues increase with age. At the same time, mental and physical fitness are closely related and should be assessed together.
- Conclusion of fitness to work assessment is predisposed by the interface among functional capacity, health, the type of work, and options for work accommodation or change.
- In general, studies report that older workers exhibit lesser turnover, more commitment to the workplace, and have more positive work values. Absenteeism is less prevalent in relation to younger workers, although it is longer when it is caused by the injury or chronic illness.
- With respect to clinical and/or laboratory measurements, some authors have recommended the use of a 'work ability index' for specific occupations as a practical means of selecting the appropriate worker for the job.
- Such index has been made at Finnish Institute of Occupational Health as an instrument used in occupational health care and research to assess work ability of workers during health examinations and workplace surveys.

## Conclusion

- Appropriate understanding of the work nature and workplace settings are essential for any fitness to work assessment among older workers.
- The assessment should include physical, mental and social capacity, as well as assessment of any disability.
- Occupational physicians have an important role in making longer working lifetimes as possible with productive and healthy older workers.