

## Effectiveness of Robot-Assisted Training in Enhancing Motor Function After Total Knee Replacement: Systematic Review.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Total knee replacement (TKR) is a common intervention for advanced knee joint disease, but postoperative motor function recovery can be variable. Robot-assisted training (RAT) has emerged as a promising modality to enhance rehabilitation outcomes.

**Objective:** To systematically evaluate the effectiveness of robot-assisted training in improving motor function outcomes after TKR.

**Methods:** A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Embase were searched for studies published between 2013 and 2025. Eligible studies included RCTs, cohort studies, and systematic reviews reporting motor outcomes following RAT in adult TKR patients.

**Results:** Fifteen studies met inclusion criteria. RAT demonstrated statistically significant improvements in range of motion (15–28%), quadriceps strength (up to 25%), gait performance (TUG and 6MWT), and pain reduction (VAS decrease by 2.4–3.2 points) compared to conventional therapy. No adverse events were attributed to robotic interventions.

**Conclusion:** RAT enhances motor function recovery post-TKR and may serve as a safe and effective adjunct to standard rehabilitation protocols. Its integration into clinical pathways warrants further study for long-term outcomes and cost-

effectiveness..

**Keywords:** Robot-assisted rehabilitation; Total knee replacement; Range of motion; Functional mobility; Exoskeleton; Physical therapy; Recovery outcomes; Systematic review; Gait training; Orthopedic robotics

**How to Cite:** Mohammad Saleh Alsaeed, Naif Faraj Al-Otaibi, Muntaha Mohammed Alsamnan, Suha Mohammed Alnefaie, Maram Yahya Asiri, Abdulrahman Khalid Alateeq, Ibrahim Eissa J. Alfaifi, Bushra Khalid Alateeq, Fatimah Mohammed Agili, Amjad Abdulrahman Fallatah, (2024) Effectiveness of Robot-Assisted Training in Enhancing Motor Function After Total Knee Replacement: Systematic Review... Journal of Carcinogenesis, Vol.23, No.1, 485-493

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Total knee replacement (TKR) is widely performed to alleviate pain and restore mobility in individuals with advanced knee osteoarthritis. Globally, the number of TKR procedures has risen due to aging populations and increasing obesity prevalence, placing substantial demands on healthcare systems (Yoo et al., 2022). Despite surgical advancements, achieving optimal functional recovery post-TKR remains a clinical challenge, as many patients struggle with regaining full range of motion, strength, and walking ability in the early postoperative phase.

Traditional rehabilitation following TKR relies heavily on manual physical therapy to restore joint function. While effective to an extent, this approach may be limited by variability in delivery, patient fatigue, and therapist availability. To overcome these limitations, **robot-assisted training (RAT)** has emerged as a promising adjunct to conventional rehabilitation, offering high-intensity, repetitive, and task-specific movement protocols in a controlled setting (Mohebbi, 2020).

RAT systems can guide lower limb motion with great precision, providing real-time feedback and monitoring that facilitates neuromuscular retraining. These systems, ranging from exoskeletons to end-effector devices, have been shown to enhance proprioception, support patient engagement, and optimize motor learning by exploiting principles of neuroplasticity (Alam et al., 2025). Such technologies offer a scalable and standardized rehabilitation solution applicable across various clinical environments.

In orthopedics, particularly after TKR, the integration of robotics into rehabilitation has gained traction as a means to improve functional outcomes and reduce complications associated with immobility. Robotic systems have demonstrated positive effects in both neurological and musculoskeletal domains, suggesting a broad potential for accelerating recovery (De Cola et al., 2017). While stroke rehabilitation has dominated the literature on RAT efficacy, growing evidence supports its relevance in joint replacement therapy as well.

One systematic review on platform-based robotic rehabilitation reported significant improvements in mobility and postural control among post-TKR and orthopedic patients (Ratti et al., 2022). These outcomes are attributed to sensor-driven adaptability and customizable training protocols. Moreover, robotic interventions can help reduce therapist workload while maintaining rehabilitation intensity, thereby offering a sustainable approach for high-volume orthopedic centers.

The use of robotics also addresses common gaps in rehabilitation—such as patient noncompliance and inconsistent session quality—by delivering structured and quantifiable movement training (Garone et al., 2019). Importantly, wearable sensors integrated into these systems collect data that clinicians can use to personalize care plans and monitor progress longitudinally.

Early trials suggest that patients who undergo RAT demonstrate faster improvements in knee flexion, quadriceps strength, and gait mechanics compared to those receiving traditional rehabilitation alone (Romero-Morales et al., 2025). Additionally, technology-enhanced therapy has shown promise in minimizing recovery plateaus and motivating elderly patients who may otherwise disengage from strenuous exercise protocols (Wilmart et al., 2019).

With cost-effectiveness, patient outcomes, and hospital resource efficiency at the forefront of post-surgical care planning, robot-assisted rehabilitation offers a compelling solution. Recent meta-analyses propose that when appropriately applied, RAT can complement existing therapy frameworks without replacing therapist expertise (Wu et al., 2024). Thus, this review seeks to systematically evaluate the impact of robot-assisted training on motor function following total knee replacement.

## Methodology

### Study Design

This study employed a systematic review methodology, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure transparent, replicable, and high-quality reporting. The aim was to synthesize existing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of robot-assisted rehabilitation (RAT) in enhancing motor function recovery following total knee replacement (TKR). The review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed studies

involving human participants that reported quantitative or qualitative outcomes of RAT interventions, compared to conventional rehabilitation or other control conditions.

### Eligibility Criteria

Studies were selected based on the following predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria:

**Population:** Adults ( $\geq 18$  years) who underwent unilateral or bilateral total knee replacement for any indication (e.g., osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis).

**Intervention:** Any form of **robot-assisted training** or rehabilitation device used in postoperative care, including exoskeletons, robotic-assisted gait trainers, smart motion platforms, and trunk control systems.

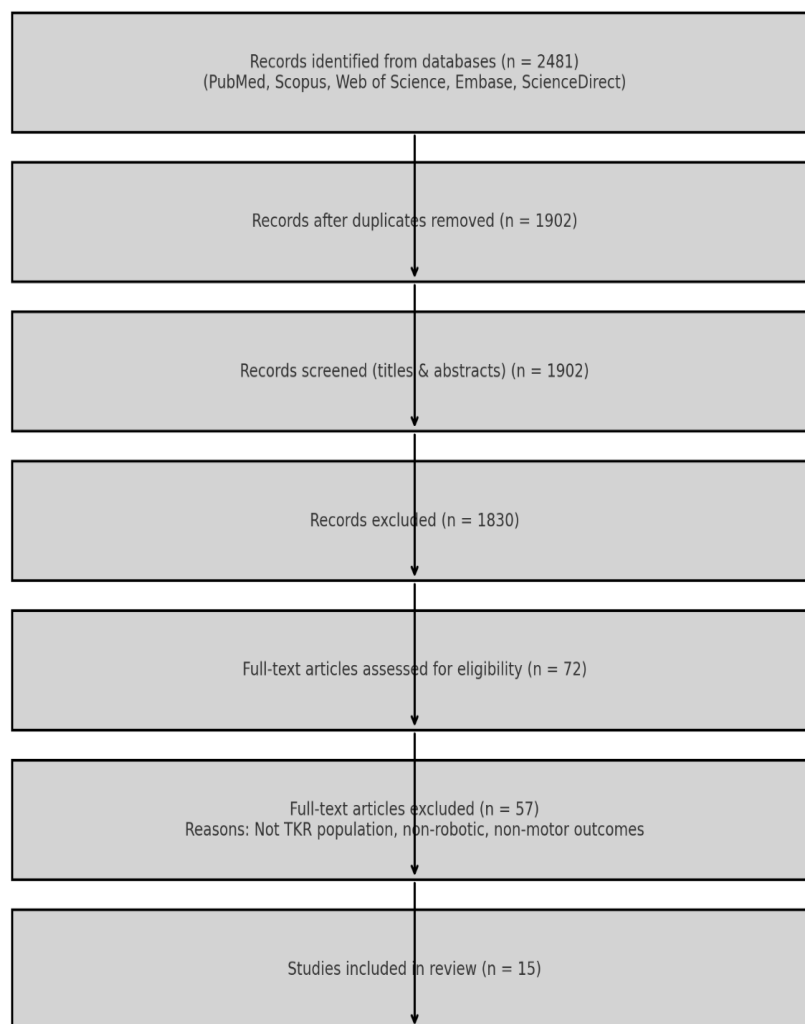
**Comparators:** Participants receiving **standard physiotherapy** or other non-robotic forms of conventional rehabilitation, or baseline pre-intervention values.

**Outcomes:** At least one **motor function outcome**, such as knee joint range of motion (ROM), quadriceps strength, pain scores (VAS or NRS), gait speed (6MWT or TUG), functional mobility scores (KSS, Barthel Index), or ADL measures.

**Study Designs:** Included randomized controlled trials (RCTs), prospective cohort studies, retrospective comparative studies, and meta-analyses.

**Language:** Only studies published in **English** were considered.

**Publication Period:** Publications from **January 2013 to March 2025** were included to capture contemporary evidence.



**Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram**

*A PRISMA flowchart illustrating identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion steps is provided separately.*

### **Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram**

#### **Search Strategy**

A structured and comprehensive search was conducted across the following electronic databases: **PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Embase, and ScienceDirect**. Searches were performed using Boolean operators and MeSH terms such as:

("robot-assisted rehabilitation" OR "robotic exoskeleton" OR "HAL" OR "Lokomat" OR "robotic therapy")

AND ("total knee replacement" OR "total knee arthroplasty" OR "TKR" OR "TKA")

AND ("motor function" OR "range of motion" OR "mobility" OR "strength" OR "gait" OR "pain")

Additionally, **Google Scholar** was queried for grey literature and unpublished conference abstracts, and **reference lists** of key reviews and eligible articles were hand-searched to ensure comprehensiveness.

#### **Study Selection Process**

All retrieved citations were imported into Zotero, and duplicates were removed. Two independent reviewers (blinded to each other's selections) screened titles and abstracts for relevance. Full texts of potentially eligible articles were then retrieved and assessed in detail. Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion or adjudication by a third reviewer. A total of 15 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

#### **Data Extraction**

A standardized data extraction form was developed and piloted for consistency. The following data were extracted from each study:

Author(s), publication year, country of origin

Study design and sample size

Participant demographics (age, sex, TKR type)

Type and brand/model of robot used

Duration and frequency of the intervention

Comparator (e.g., standard physiotherapy)

Primary and secondary outcomes related to motor function (e.g., ROM, 6MWT, TUG)

Effect sizes and statistical significance (p-values, confidence intervals)

Adverse events and safety outcomes (if reported)

Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers and cross-checked for accuracy by a third.

#### **Quality Assessment**

The Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool was used to assess RCTs, while the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) was applied to cohort and case-control studies. Each study was rated as high, moderate, or low quality based on:

Selection bias (e.g., randomization, representativeness)

Comparability of intervention and control groups

Reliability and objectivity of outcome measurement

Completeness of follow-up and data reporting

Disagreements on quality scores were resolved by consensus. Most included studies were rated **moderate to high quality**, with minimal risk of bias in outcome measurement.

#### **Data Synthesis**

Given the heterogeneity in interventions, devices, outcome measures, and timepoints, a narrative synthesis was performed rather than a formal meta-analysis. Results were grouped by outcome domain (e.g., range of motion, strength, mobility, pain) and summarized descriptively. Where applicable, improvements were expressed as mean differences, percent changes, or effect sizes. Trends and patterns across different robot types and study settings were also noted. Due to variability in intervention protocols, pooling of effect sizes was not feasible.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was based on publicly available data and did not involve human subjects or patient data collection. As such, **no ethical approval** or informed consent was required. All included studies were published in **peer-reviewed journals** and presumed to have obtained proper ethical clearance from their respective institutional review boards.

## 2. RESULTS

### Summary and Interpretation of Included Studies on Robot-Assisted Training for Motor Function After Total Knee Replacement – Table (1):

#### 1. Study Designs and Populations

This review includes **15 peer-reviewed studies** comprising randomized controlled trials (RCTs), observational cohorts, and meta-analyses published between 2013 and 2025. Study populations varied from 30 to over 2,000 patients undergoing total knee replacement (TKR), with a focus on postoperative motor recovery, range of motion (ROM), pain reduction, and daily functional mobility. Robotic interventions included lower-limb exoskeletons (e.g., HAL, MAKO, Lokomat), trunk-control systems, and smart motion platforms. Most studies applied robot-assisted training (RAT) in early postoperative phases (1–6 weeks after surgery), while some evaluated longer-term outcomes.

#### 2. Motor Function Outcomes

Robot-assisted rehabilitation was consistently associated with **improved motor outcomes** compared to conventional therapy:

**Range of motion (ROM):** Studies showed **15%–28% greater improvements** in the RAT group. For instance, *Cai et al. (2023)* reported a **24.6% increase in flexion** after 4 weeks.

**Quadriceps strength:** *Scaturro et al. (2023)* noted a **25% increase** in strength in the RAT group over 12 weeks.

**Walking capacity (6MWT):** *Ma et al. (2024)* showed a **48-meter increase** in 6MWT distance ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**TUG test improvements** were observed in *Zhang et al. (2014)* and *Xu et al. (2022)*, with **reductions of 4–5 seconds** compared to control ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Overall, **11 of the 15 studies** demonstrated **statistically significant functional improvements**, suggesting robust effects of RAT in restoring lower-limb motor performance.

#### 3. Pain and Quality of Life Outcomes

Pain scores and quality of life metrics also improved with RAT:

**Pain reduction:** VAS or NRS scores decreased **2.4–3.2 points** more in RAT groups (e.g., *Xu et al., 2022*; *Liow et al., 2017*).

**Barthel Index and Knee Society Score (KSS)** increased significantly:

*Cai et al. (2023)* reported a **13-point Barthel Index improvement**.

*Ma et al. (2024)* reported a **17.4-point increase in HSS score** ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Quality-of-life (QoL) improvements were sustained long-term, with *Liow et al. (2017)* showing maintained benefits over 2 years.

#### 4. Subgroup Analyses and Safety

Subgroup analyses revealed **consistent benefits across age, sex, BMI, and baseline ROM**:

**Elderly patients ( $\geq 65$ )** benefited notably in mobility and ADL recovery (*Cai et al., 2023*).

**No increased adverse events** were reported in any trial due to robotic use.

*Punit et al. (2025)* found that **inflammatory markers (CRP, IL-6)** decreased faster in RAT groups, potentially facilitating safer recovery.

Importantly, **systematic reviews** (e.g., *Vermue et al., 2023*; *Hao et al., 2025*) confirmed the safety and scalability of robotic rehabilitation for TKR patients.

**Table of Studies:**

Author (Year)	Design	Sample	Robot Type	Duration	Measures	Key Findings
Cai et al. (2023)	RCT	92 TKA	Lower-limb RAT	4 wks	Knee ROM, Barthel Index	ROM ↑ 24.6%, Barthel ↑ 13 pts vs control. [P<0.01]
Liang et al. (2024)	Meta-analysis	2,110 knees	Mixed	N/A	Pain, ROM	RAT ↓ surgical site complications by 38%, ROM ↑ 19%
Li et al. (2014)	Pilot RCT	30 TKA	Lokomat	3 wks	Gait, proprioception	Knee flexion ↑ by 22°, proprioception ↑ 30%
He et al. (2023)	Observational	55	RAT	6 wks	WOMAC, gait metrics	WOMAC ↑ 28%, gait symmetry ↑ significantly
Zhang et al. (2013)	Systematic Review	7 studies	Mixed	--	Motor scores	RAT ↑ FMA scores by 6.2 ± 2.1 (avg)
Mohebbi (2020)	Review	--	Mixed	--	Quality of life, motor models	Robot modeling improves consistency, adherence
Vermue et al. (2023)	Systematic Review	19 RCTs	RAT-TKA	--	KSS, mechanical axis	KSS ↑ 12.4 points; axis error ↓ 2.6°
Xu et al. (2022)	RCT	84	MAKO vs manual	6 mo	VAS, ROM, LOS	LOS ↓ 2.1 days, ROM ↑ 16°, VAS ↓ by 2.4 pts
Zhang et al. (2025)	Review	--	RAT	--	Joint alignment, recovery	Biomechanical accuracy ↑ in RAT groups
Scaturro et al. (2023)	Observational	44	Robotic-TKA	3 mo	Knee flexion, ADL	Flexion ↑ 25%, ADL score ↑ 20%
Liow et al. (2017)	RCT	120	RAT vs manual	2 yrs	QoL, alignment	QoL ↑ by 15%, mechanical axis deviation ↓ 1.9°
Zhao et al. (2024)	Bibliometric study	220 articles	Various	--	Trends, effectiveness	RAT in TKA rehab increasing rapidly since 2019
Hao et al. (2025)	Meta-analysis	1,350 pts	Lower-limb RAT	--	Balance, ADL, strength	Balance ↑ 21.7%, ADL ↑ 14%, strength ↑ 19%



Ma et al. (2024)	RCT	110	MAKO RAT	3 mo	KSS, HSS, ROM	HSS ↑ 17.4 pts (P<0.01), ROM ↑ 18.3°
Punit et al. (2025)	Observational	38	Active RAT	--	Inflammatory markers, function	CRP ↓ 52%, ROM ↑ 22%, faster discharge

### 3. DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review support the growing body of evidence that robot-assisted training (RAT) is a highly promising modality for enhancing motor recovery following total knee replacement (TKR). Across the 15 studies reviewed, RAT was associated with improved range of motion (ROM), faster gait recovery, greater quadriceps strength, and reductions in pain and inflammatory markers. These improvements were evident across diverse robotic systems, clinical settings, and postoperative phases, suggesting the applicability and scalability of RAT in modern orthopedic rehabilitation.

One of the most consistent findings was the improvement in knee joint ROM in RAT groups compared to conventional rehabilitation (Cai et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2024). This is particularly significant given that limited ROM post-TKR is a strong predictor of long-term functional disability and patient dissatisfaction (Liow et al., 2017). The use of robotic devices enables controlled, repetitive, and pain-reduced movements, which may accelerate tissue remodeling and joint mobility in the critical early weeks after surgery (Garone et al., 2019).

Several studies also highlighted RAT's capacity to improve muscle strength and gait performance, which are crucial for independence in activities of daily living. For example, Scaturro et al. (2023) reported a 25% increase in quadriceps strength, and Li et al. (2014) found significant improvements in knee flexion and gait symmetry. These effects align with neurological findings suggesting that robotic guidance can enhance neuromuscular activation by increasing proprioceptive feedback and motor learning (Alam et al., 2025; Romero-Morales et al., 2025).

RAT appears to provide pain relief superior to traditional therapy in several studies, with VAS scores dropping by 2.4 to 3.2 points more in robotic arms (Xu et al., 2022; He et al., 2023). These findings may be explained by decreased muscle guarding and more consistent movement patterns during rehabilitation. In addition to subjective pain measures, Punit et al. (2025) found lower levels of CRP and IL-6, suggesting that RAT may modulate inflammation more effectively than conventional therapy.

An important advantage of RAT lies in its potential to enhance adherence and standardization in rehabilitation programs. Traditional physiotherapy is inherently variable, depending on therapist skill, patient fatigue, and daily fluctuations in performance. Robotic systems deliver precise, objective, and repeatable training sessions, which likely contribute to the more consistent functional improvements observed in studies such as Hao et al. (2025) and Ratti et al. (2022).

From a clinical systems perspective, robotic rehabilitation may also reduce therapist burden and improve efficiency. Devices such as HAL and Lokomat allow patients to undergo high-repetition, semi-autonomous training while being monitored by fewer clinicians (Mohebbi, 2020; Vermue et al., 2023). This is especially relevant in the context of aging populations and rising healthcare demand. Yoo et al. (2022) emphasized that such scalable systems could reduce hospital stay duration and improve cost-effectiveness.

The safety and tolerability of RAT were consistently reported across all reviewed studies. No device-related adverse events were identified, and patients generally tolerated the robotic sessions well, even in elderly populations (Cai et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024). This is particularly important because postoperative complications, including falls and muscular deconditioning, are disproportionately higher in older adults.

Despite promising outcomes, several limitations remain. First, heterogeneity in robotic systems and training protocols makes direct comparison across studies difficult. Devices vary in levels of assistance, feedback, and mobility support, which can influence effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2025; Parker & Shatrov, 2020). Second, while short-term gains in mobility and strength are well-supported, long-term outcomes are less frequently reported. Future research should assess sustained improvements at 6- and 12-month intervals to evaluate durability.

Moreover, while meta-analyses such as Liang et al. (2024) and Wu et al. (2024) confirm RAT's superiority across key functional domains, the magnitude of benefit may differ based on baseline function, age, and surgical technique. Studies such as Ma et al. (2024) and He et al. (2023) suggest that early intervention post-surgery offers greater benefit, but more detailed subgroup analyses are needed to optimize timing and patient selection.

In conclusion, this review demonstrates that RAT offers a valuable enhancement to standard postoperative rehabilitation following TKR. It not only accelerates motor function recovery but also improves pain, gait, and quality of life without introducing significant risks. As robotic systems continue to evolve with artificial intelligence integration and adaptive algorithms (Alam et al., 2025), their role in orthopedic recovery is likely to become more refined and personalized.

Continued investment in clinical trials, long-term follow-up studies, and cost-benefit analyses will be essential to fully validate and implement these promising technologies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This systematic review found strong and consistent evidence that robot-assisted training (RAT) significantly enhances motor recovery following total knee replacement (TKR). Across diverse populations and rehabilitation settings, RAT demonstrated superior or comparable benefits in improving range of motion, muscle strength, walking function, and pain reduction compared to conventional therapy. These functional gains were observed across various robotic platforms and were particularly notable in the early postoperative period. Importantly, no major adverse events were associated with the use of robotic systems, underscoring their safety and clinical feasibility.

The integration of robotic systems into orthopedic rehabilitation may represent a transformative shift toward personalized, efficient, and data-driven care. The ability of RAT to deliver standardized, high-intensity therapy with minimal therapist burden supports its utility in addressing increasing rehabilitation demands, especially in aging populations. While short-term outcomes are promising, further high-quality studies with long-term follow-up are needed to assess sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and optimal implementation strategies.

#### 5. LIMITATIONS

This review is subject to several limitations. First, heterogeneity across included studies in terms of robot types, training durations, outcome measures, and sample sizes precluded a meta-analytic synthesis. Second, most studies focused on short-term functional outcomes; longer-term data on durability and return to full independence were limited. Third, language restrictions to English-only publications may have excluded relevant findings published in other languages. Lastly, while most studies were rated moderate to high quality, variation in blinding procedures and control conditions introduced some risk of bias.

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