

3.2.4.1 Population (types of participants)

This section should specify the details about types of participants considered for the review, for example, age; gender; ethnicity; diagnosis; diagnostic criteria; stage or severity of the disease; co-existing diseases. What are the most important characteristics of the population? (e.g., age, disease/condition, severity of illness, setting, gender, etc.).

Consider the following example regarding COPD, describe the population (*patients with COPD*), the severity of illness (*moderate-to-severe*), trajectory of the disease (*stable*), with a specific setting (*community dwelling*). Diagnostic criteria should be made clear to allow inclusion and exclusion; if reviewers anticipate subgroup analysis related to population characteristics, these subgroups should be reflected in the population inclusion criteria. For example, '*COPD includes patients with chronic bronchitis and emphysema but not asthma (fixed airway obstruction with forced expiratory volume in one second [FEV₁] less than <80% of predicted). According to the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) and the American Thoracic/European Respiratory Society Guidelines (ATS/ERS), the description of the severity of disease is as follows: stage II or moderate disease is an FEV₁ of 50-80% predicted; stage III or severe is an FEV₁ of 30-50% predicted and stage IV or very severe is an FEV₁ <30% predicted. Patients with reversible airway disease (improvement in FEV₁ >20% with fast acting bronchodilator) will be excluded because their response to training may relate more to changes in their airway obstruction than a training effect.*' Specific reference to population characteristics, either for inclusion or exclusion should be based on a clear, scientific justification rather than based on unsubstantiated clinical, theoretical or personal reasoning.