

# Effectiveness of a comprehensive home-based cardiac rehabilitation intervention on the health promotion of patients with coronary artery disease: A randomized double-blind clinical trial

Zahra Teimouri-Jervekani<sup>1</sup>, Niloufar Ebadi<sup>2</sup>, Marjan Jamalian<sup>3</sup>, Fereshte Rastegarnasab<sup>4</sup>, Safoura Yazdekhashti<sup>1</sup>, Hamidreza Roohafza<sup>2</sup>, Hassan Okati Aliabad<sup>5</sup>, Alireza Ansari Moghaddam<sup>5</sup>, Masoumeh Sadeghi<sup>1\*</sup>

## Correspondence:

Masoumeh Sadeghi;  
Cardiac Rehabilitation Research  
Center, Cardiovascular Research  
Institute, Isfahan University of  
Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran;  
Email: [sadeghimasoumeh@gmail.com](mailto:sadeghimasoumeh@gmail.com)

Received: 2025-10-27

Accepted: 2026-04-19

## How to cite this article:

Teimouri-Jervekani Z, Ebadi N, Jamalian M, Rastegarnasab F, Yazdekhashti S, Roohafza H, Okati Aliabad H, Ansari Moghaddam A, Sadeghi M. **Effectiveness of a comprehensive home-based cardiac rehabilitation intervention on the health promotion of patients with coronary artery disease: A randomized double-blind clinical trial.** ARYA Atheroscler. 2026; 22(3): 67-74.

## DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.48305/arya.2026.45704.3108>

1- Cardiac Rehabilitation Research Center, Cardiovascular Research Institute, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

2- Isfahan Cardiovascular Research Center, Cardiovascular Research Institute, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

3- Chamran Cardiovascular Medical and Research Hospital, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

4- Hypertension Research Center, Cardiovascular Research Institute, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

5- Health Promotion Research Center, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran

## Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** This study aimed to assess the efficacy of a comprehensive home-based cardiac rehabilitation (HBCR) program in promoting health outcomes among Iranian patients with coronary artery disease (CAD).

**METHODS:** This randomized, double-blind, clinical trial was conducted on 259 patients with CAD. Participants were allocated to receive either usual care or the HBCR program. Anthropometric indices, lipid profiles, and cardiovascular events were evaluated at baseline and during the follow-up periods.

**RESULTS:** Changes in serum low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) and arterial blood pressure did not differ significantly between the groups. Body mass index (BMI) was significantly reduced in the HBCR group compared to the control group ( $P = 0.004$ ). At the study endpoint, hip circumference also demonstrated a more favorable status in the HBCR group ( $P = 0.002$ ). High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) serum levels improved more prominently in the HBCR group ( $P = 0.030$ ). Triglyceride (TG) levels showed a similar pattern in both groups, but the overall increase after 12 months was significantly higher in the control group ( $P = 0.019$ ). Serum total cholesterol (TC) continuously increased in the control group, whereas it decreased in the HBCR group at 12 months, remaining significantly lower than in the control group overall ( $P = 0.003$ ). Regarding cardiovascular events, mortality was significantly higher in the control group after 18 months ( $P = 0.007$ ). Additionally, the rate of return to work after 6 months was significantly higher in the HBCR group ( $P = 0.020$ ).

**CONCLUSION:** This study demonstrated that a home-based cardiac rehabilitation program is an effective intervention for patients with CAD, leading to superior clinical outcomes.

**Keywords:** Home-Based Cardiac Rehabilitation Intervention; Coronary Artery Disease; Lipid Profiles; Anthropometric Indexes

## Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is an important public health crisis around the world<sup>1</sup>. The incidence of CVD is projected to increase to 25% by 2030, compared to 5% in 2000<sup>2</sup>. CVD is responsible for 17.3 million deaths annually from non-communicable diseases and accounts for 10% of the global burden of disease<sup>1</sup>. It is also the leading cause of mortality and disability-adjusted life years in Iran<sup>3</sup>.

With an increasing number of symptomatic CVD patients living longer, the efficacy and availability of health services have become more critical. Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) has become a class I recommendation by the European Society of Cardiology, the American College of Cardiology, and the American Heart Association<sup>4-7</sup>. CR programs include structured exercise training and education focusing on lifestyle and risk factor modification<sup>4-6</sup>.

CR has a significant impact on vascular endothelial function, autonomic tone, myocardial oxygen demand, inflammatory markers, clotting and coagulation factors, and the development of collateral coronary vessels<sup>8</sup>.

Despite these benefits, patient uptake remains low, with only 30% of eligible individuals participating in a CR program<sup>9,10</sup>. Furthermore, only 50% of participants remain active after completing the CR intervention<sup>10</sup>.

Prior studies have shown that various social and environmental barriers contribute to low participation and adherence, such as financial constraints, limited availability and accessibility, low self-efficacy, and time limitations<sup>11,12</sup>. Therefore, a home-based cardiac rehabilitation (HBCR) program may help increase participation rates and ensure long-term adherence. Additionally, such programs have been shown to improve patients' self-efficacy<sup>13,14</sup>.

To the best of our knowledge, there is limited research investigating home-based rehabilitation programs in Iran. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the efficacy of a comprehensive HBCR program in promoting health outcomes among Iranian patients with coronary artery disease (CAD).

## Methods

### Study Design

This study was conducted at the cardiovascular department of Alzahra, Chamran, and Noor Hospitals in Isfahan, Iran, from 2017 to 2019<sup>15</sup>. It was designed as a randomized, double-blind, clinical trial comparing the health promotion parameters of patients receiving the HBCR program (intervention group) with those receiving usual care (control group). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IR.MUI.MED.REC.1399.219). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

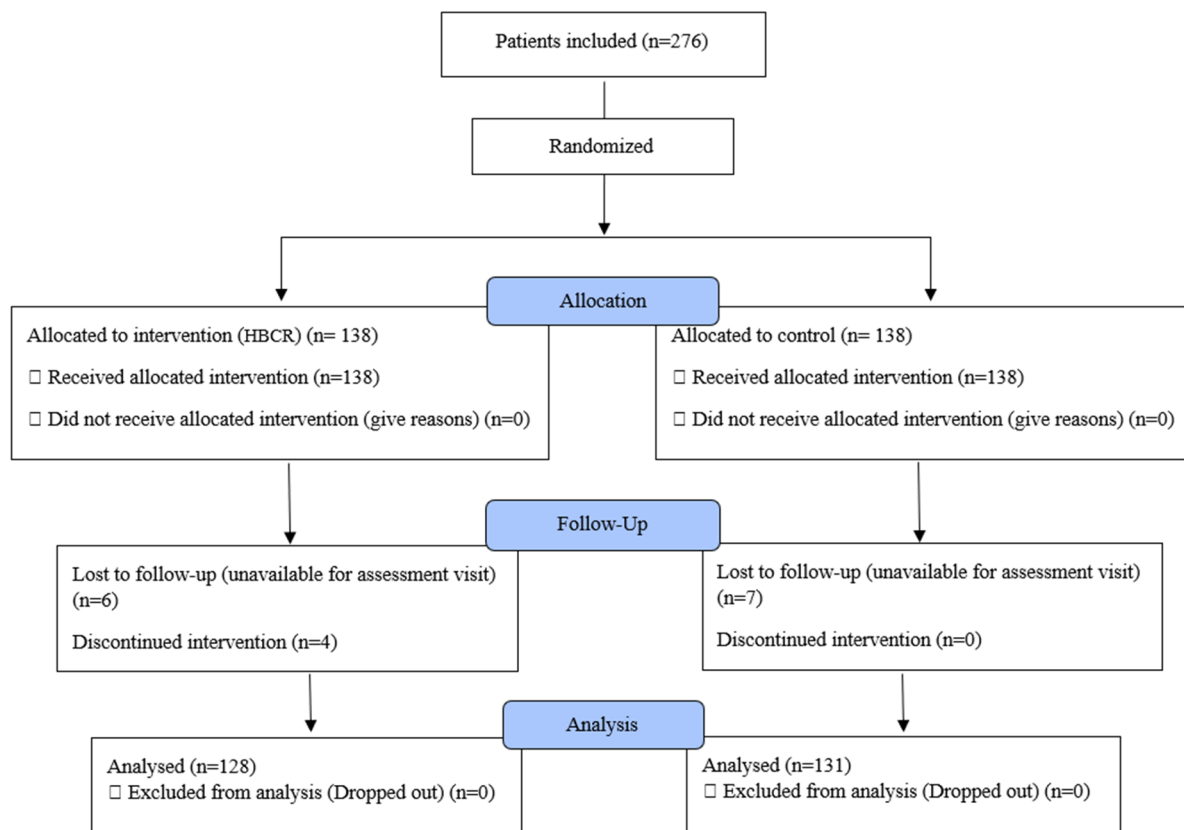
### Study Population

Patients aged over 18 years diagnosed with ischemic heart disease were eligible for inclusion. Patients with dementia, uncontrolled cardiac arrhythmia, or walking impairment due to causes other than CAD were excluded. As shown in the study flowchart ([Figure 1](#)), 276 patients with CAD were enrolled and randomly assigned to the two groups using a block randomization technique with matched sex and age per block. The care providers, outcome assessors, and data analysts were blinded to the group assignments during the study.

### Intervention

Patients in the HBCR group received a home-based rehabilitation program, including a heart-healthy diet, stress management, lifestyle modification, smoking cessation counseling, and individualized exercise programs, alongside routine care. The educational content was developed based on behavioral change models by experts in health education and promotion, cardiology, and sports medicine, in line with the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA). The program also incorporated motivational factors such as outcome expectations, self-efficacy, and risk perception, alongside volitional aspects like action planning and coping planning.

An exercise program was designed for patients using the cardiac care manual handbook and protocols from previous studies. Patients in



**Figure 1.** Study Flowchart in CONSORT Format

this group were scheduled to perform regular physical activity based on the initial exercise test (Modified Bruce protocol), three times a week, including a warm-up, moderate-intensity aerobic activity with a gradual increase in duration, and a cool-down phase. Additionally, participants received nutritional, psychological, and smoking cessation counseling sessions. A cardiologist and a sports medicine specialist visited the patients at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months. Patients who could not attend the hospital visits received home visits from trained nurses. Participants were provided with a telephone number to contact the specialists regarding any potential problems.

#### Control

The control group received standard training courses offered to patients based on the hospital's routine general recommendations. The training materials included a healthy

lifestyle, aerobic exercise, nutritional instructions, and cardiovascular advice at subsequent appointments at 6 and 12 months after discharge.

#### Variables

Demographic and clinical data were gathered using open-ended questions by trained staff. Body mass index (BMI), arterial blood pressure, waist circumference (WC), hip circumference (HC), and serum lipid profile were recorded.

Outcomes, including anthropometric indices and lipid profiles, cardiovascular events, re-admissions, and cardiac-associated deaths, were evaluated at follow-ups.

#### Data Analyses

SPSS software 20.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) was utilized. Categorical data were presented as numbers (percentages), while continuous variables were reported as

mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of quantitative variables. The Chi-square test (or Fisher's exact test) was employed to examine differences in frequency distributions. Generalized estimating equations (GEE) were used to evaluate the outcomes over the study period. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

The HBCR and usual care groups consisted of 128 and 131 participants, respectively. Baseline characteristics were not significantly different among groups (Table 1).

Following patients for 12 months revealed that changes in serum low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and arterial blood pressure were not significantly different among groups ( $P > 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

BMI increased after 6 months and then decreased in 12 months among groups; nevertheless, the reduction was significantly more in the HBCR group ( $P = 0.004$ ) (Table 2). WC and HC had sharply increased in the intervention group after 6 months. Although, these amounts reduced in this group and increased in the control group in 12 months. Finally, at the endpoint, a better condition was seen for the HC in the HBCR group ( $P = 0.002$ ) (Table 2).

Changes in high-density lipoprotein (HDL) serum levels were significant ( $P = 0.030$ ). It increased more after 6 months and then decreased in the 12-month control group. While, it continuously increased in the intervention group. Finally, the serum levels of HDL had improved more in the intervention group (Table 2). Triglycerides (TG) had the same pattern among groups, but had increased more in the control group, overall, at the end of 12 months ( $P = 0.019$ ). Total serum cholesterol continuously increased in the control group. Although it had reduced in the HBCR group in 12 months ( $P = 0.003$ ) (Table 2).

GEE results showed that baseline BMI in the control group was significantly higher than the HBCR group at 12 months ( $P = 0.031$ ). Moreover, HC at 6 months in the control group was significantly higher than the HBCR group at 12 months ( $P = 0.001$ ). HDL after 6 months in the control group was significantly higher than in the 12-month intervention group ( $P = 0.008$ ). Furthermore, serum levels of total cholesterol in the control group at baseline and 6 months were higher than 12 months in the intervention group ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Regarding cardiovascular events, the rehospitalization rate did not differ significantly over time. Mortality was higher among the control group after 18 months ( $P = 0.007$ ). Also,

**Table 1.** Baseline Characteristics and Anthropometric Measurements of the Study Participants

| Variable                     | HBCR<br>(N=128)  | UC<br>(N=131)    | P-value |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------|
| Age (years), Mean $\pm$ SD   | 56.28 $\pm$ 7.95 | 55.54 $\pm$ 6.78 | 0.421   |
| <b>Gender, N (%)</b>         |                  |                  | 0.441   |
| Male                         | 110 (85.9)       | 108 (82.4)       |         |
| Female                       | 18 (14.1)        | 23 (17.6)        |         |
| <b>Marital status, N (%)</b> |                  |                  | 0.660   |
| Single                       | 3 (2.3)          | 1 (0.8)          |         |
| Married                      | 123 (96.1)       | 127 (96.9)       |         |
| Other                        | 2 (1.6)          | 3 (2.3)          |         |
| <b>Education, N (%)</b>      |                  |                  | 0.348   |
| Elementary                   | 71 (55.5%)       | 58 (44.3%)       |         |
| Secondary and High School    | 45 (35.1%)       | 57 (43.4%)       |         |
| University Graduate          | 12 (9.4%)        | 16 (12.3%)       |         |
| <b>Risk factors, N (%)</b>   |                  |                  |         |
| Hypertension                 | 45 (35.2)        | 40 (30.5)        | 0.428   |
| Hyperlipidemia               | 60 (46.9)        | 42 (32.1)        | 0.015*  |
| Diabetes                     | 17 (13.3)        | 23 (17.6)        | 0.306   |
| Current Smoker, N (%)        | 27 (52.9)        | 28 (57.1)        | 0.800   |

SD: Standard Deviation. Risk factors included hypertension, Hyperlipidemia, and Diabetes in the study.

**Table 2.** Comparing the Anthropometric and Lipid Profile Amounts Between Groups at Three Time Points

| Variables           | Assessment time points, Mean (SE) |              |              | P-value |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------|
|                     | Baseline                          | 6-month      | 12-month     |         |
| BMI                 |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC <sup>a</sup>     | 27.63(0.38)                       | 27.92(0.40)  | 27.84(0.41)  | 0.004*  |
| HBCR                | 28.37(0.35)                       | 28.48(0.36)  | 28.19(0.37)  |         |
| WC                  |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC                  | 99.46(0.89)                       | 99.33(0.95)  | 100.01(0.96) | 0.001*  |
| HBCR <sup>ac</sup>  | 99.06(0.91)                       | 102.37(1.17) | 101.12(0.93) |         |
| HC                  |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC <sup>bc</sup>    | 101.60(0.69)                      | 102.21(0.75) | 103.02(0.77) | 0.002*  |
| HBCR <sup>ab</sup>  | 101.79(0.68)                      | 103.58(0.67) | 102.39(0.75) |         |
| SBP                 |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC                  | 121.41(1.53)                      | 121.97(1.70) | 121.11(1.45) | 0.639   |
| HBCR                | 125.63(1.64)                      | 124.44(1.52) | 124.67(1.68) |         |
| DBP                 |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC                  | 80.08(0.97)                       | 80.77(1.06)  | 80.99(0.96)  | 0.520   |
| HBCR                | 81.73(0.92)                       | 81.31(0.98)  | 82.59(1.06)  |         |
| TG                  |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC <sup>b</sup>     | 151.42(5.36)                      | 142.89(4.64) | 155.18(5.29) | 0.019*  |
| HBCR                | 167.50(6.84)                      | 162.86(6.46) | 167.90(8.71) |         |
| TC                  |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC <sup>bc</sup>    | 150.23(2.93)                      | 158.94(3.47) | 167.11(3.55) | 0.003*  |
| HBCR <sup>ab</sup>  | 154.85(2.90)                      | 167.51(3.60) | 160.43(4.17) |         |
| HDL                 |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC <sup>ac</sup>    | 34.87(1.71)                       | 41.69(0.96)  | 39.66(1.18)  | 0.030*  |
| HBCR <sup>abc</sup> | 33.58(0.86)                       | 37.71(1.11)  | 40.15(0.70)  |         |
| LDL                 |                                   |              |              |         |
| UC                  | 82.97(2.74)                       | 86.98(3.01)  | 88.64(2.92)  | 0.499   |
| HBCR                | 83.19(2.44)                       | 82.58(2.90)  | 84.82(2.80)  |         |

SE: Standard Error, BMI: Body Mass Index, WC: Waist Circumference, HC: Hip Circumference, SBP: Systolic Blood Pressure, DBP: Diastolic Blood Pressure, TG: Triglycerides, TC: Total Cholesterol HDL: High Density Lipoprotein, LDL: Low Density Lipoprotein.

\*The significant P-value for Group × Time interaction (The GEE method was used for analyzing repeated measures when response variables are non-normal.)

<sup>a</sup> P < 0.05 for the statistical difference from baseline to months 6 within the group.

<sup>b</sup> P < 0.05 for the statistical difference from months 6 to months 12 within the group.

<sup>c</sup> P < 0.05 for the statistical difference from baseline to months 12 within the group.

back to work after 6 months was significantly more among the intervention group (P = 0.020) (Table 3).

## Discussion

Our findings indicated that the home-based rehabilitation program had a good impact on anthropometric indices such as BMI and HC, lipid profile biomarkers, cardiovascular-associated mortality, and also short-term back to work in CAD patients.

A study performed by Nikki Coghill et al. reported that 12 weeks of moderate-intensity walking improves total cholesterol and HDL in hypercholesterolemic men with coronary heart disease<sup>16</sup>.

Michael Meyer and others found that doing rehabilitation at home is safe, possible, and a good option instead of supervised cardiac rehab for people of any age with congenital heart disease. However, sticking to the training schedule is a big challenge<sup>17</sup>.

**Table 3.** Events Within 18-months Follow-up

| Events                  | 6-month, N (%) |           |         | 12-month, N (%) |         |         | 18-month, N (%) |           |         |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
|                         | UC             | HBCR      | P-value | UC              | HBCR    | P-value | UC              | HBCR      | P-value |
| Mortality (Yes)         | 4 (3.4)        | 2 (1.8)   | 0.684   | 0 (0)           | 1 (0.8) | 0.999   | 7 (5.5)         | 0 (0)     | 0.007*  |
| Rehospitalization (Yes) | 12 (10.5)      | 13 (11.7) | 0.834   | 12 (12)         | 6 (5.1) | 0.085   | 40 (33.3)       | 36 (27.5) | 0.338   |
| Back to Work (No)       | 9 (7.7)        | 1 (0.7)   | 0.020*  | 3 (3.1)         | 4 (3.4) | 0.999   | 8 (6.6)         | 13 (9.9)  | 0.371   |

UC: Usual Care, HBCR: Home-based Cardiac Rehabilitation.

Another study found that low-risk CABG patients might have the same or even better performance with a supervised home rehabilitation program compared to one done in a hospital or clinic<sup>18</sup>.

Stephan Gielen et al. reported that an HBCR program sustained the impacts of an institution-based program on endothelium-dependent vasodilation in coronary artery disease<sup>19</sup>.

Furthermore, Young-Hwa Lee et al. reported that cardiac rehabilitation with home-based physical activity training improved exercise capacity and quality of life compared to conventional care in acute coronary syndrome patients undergoing PCI<sup>20</sup>.

While such studies analyzed physical activity capacity according to different parameters, such as the shuttle walk test, oxygen consumption, or total cycle work capacity, all reported that a home-based program improves exercise capacity<sup>21</sup>. The impact of exercise on lipid profiles and the anthropometric indices has been documented in several studies<sup>22</sup>.

Over the past decade, multiple meta-analyses have shown the efficacy of home-based rehabilitation programs for CAD patients who have undergone phase II cardiac rehabilitation<sup>23-25</sup>. Similar findings are reported about low-risk patients undergone PCI or CABG, especially in elderly patients<sup>26-28</sup>.

These results were similar to ours, indicating that a home-based rehabilitation program can provide better outcomes than usual care. However, some studies show contrasting findings.

A study conducted by Andrea Avila et al. revealed that the HBCR program was as practical as usual care<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, Raquel Bravo-

Escobar et al. reported an insignificant difference between traditional cardiac rehabilitation and the home-based intervention regarding lipid profiles and outcomes<sup>30</sup>. These contradictory results may be due to study populations, intervention duration, and techniques.

The limitations of our study included the short follow-up period, small sample size, and also, we did not assess further outcomes such as the quality of life, endothelium-dependent vasodilation, or exercise capacity. Although, this is a preliminary investigation regarding an alternative cardiac rehabilitation program to help cardiologists identify the best rehabilitation choice for CAD patients. Further studies with a larger population and longer follow-up periods are necessary in the future.

## Conclusions

This study revealed that a home-based rehabilitation program is an efficient program for patients with coronary artery disease, leading to better outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

This study was financially supported by the Technology and Research Development Department of Isfahan Medical Sciences University, Isfahan, Iran. We gratefully acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the investigators, the coordinators, and the volunteer patients who participated in this study.

## Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Funding

There is no funding in this study.

## Author's Contributions

Study Conception or Design: ZTJ

Data Acquisition: NE; SY

Data Analysis or Interpretation: MJ

Manuscript Drafting: NE

Critical Manuscript Revision: ZTJ; FR; HR; HOA; AAM; MS

All authors have approved the final manuscript and are responsible for all aspects of the work.

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