

**IMPACT OF POLYPHARMACY ON THE HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY PERSON:  
NURSING STRATEGIES**

**IMPACTO DA POLIFARMÁCIA NA SAÚDE DA PESSOA IDOSA: ESTRATÉGIAS DE  
ENFERMAGEM**

**IMPACTO DE LA POLIFARMACIA EN LA SALUD DE LA PERSONA MAYOR:  
ESTRATEGIAS DE ENFERMERÍA**



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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To analyze the impacts of polypharmacy on the health of elderly people and the nursing strategies for the prevention of adverse events.

**Methodology:** This is an integrative literature review, conducted in the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE/PubMed), SciELO, and Google Scholar databases, considering publications from 2020 to 2025. Controlled descriptors from DeCS were used, combined by Boolean operators: Elderly (Aged) AND Polypharmacy (Polypharmacy) AND Nursing Care (Nursing Care).

**Results:** A total of 225 studies were identified in the databases. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and reading titles and abstracts, 33 articles remained. After removing duplicates, 27 studies were selected for full-text reading, resulting in a final sample of 12 articles that met the research objective.

**Conclusion:** Polypharmacy constitutes an important challenge for the health of the elderly population, being a multifactorial phenomenon associated with the presence of chronic

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diseases, physiological aging, and vulnerabilities in healthcare. The fundamental role of nursing in preventing adverse events is highlighted, through strategies such as nursing consultations based on the Nursing Process, health education, and the Systematization of Nursing Care, contributing to safer care and the improvement of the elderly person's quality of life.

**Keywords:** Polypharmacy. Elderly. Nursing. Public Health.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar os impactos da polifarmácia na saúde da pessoa idosa e as estratégias de enfermagem para a prevenção de eventos adversos.

**Metodologia:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, realizada nas bases de dados Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE/PubMed), SciELO e Google Acadêmico, considerando publicações no período de 2020 a 2025. Foram utilizados descritores controlados do DeCS combinados por operadores booleanos: Idosos (Aged) AND Polifarmácia (Polypharmacy) AND Cuidados de Enfermagem (Nursing Care).

**Resultados:** Foram identificados 225 estudos nas bases de dados. Após a aplicação dos critérios de inclusão e exclusão e leitura de títulos e resumos, restaram 33 artigos. Após a remoção de duplicidades, 27 estudos foram selecionados para leitura na íntegra, resultando em uma amostra final de 12 artigos que atenderam ao objetivo da pesquisa.

**Conclusão:** A polifarmácia configura-se como um importante desafio para a saúde da população idosa, sendo um fenômeno multifatorial associado à presença de doenças crônicas, ao envelhecimento fisiológico e às fragilidades no cuidado em saúde. Evidencia-se o papel fundamental da enfermagem na prevenção de eventos adversos, por meio de estratégias como a consulta de enfermagem pautada no Processo de Enfermagem, a educação em saúde e a Sistematização da Assistência de Enfermagem, contribuindo para um cuidado mais seguro e para a melhoria da qualidade de vida da pessoa idosa.

**Palavras-chave:** Polifarmácia. Idoso. Enfermagem. Saúde Pública.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar los impactos de la polifarmacia en la salud de la persona mayor y las estrategias de enfermería para la prevención de eventos adversos.

**Metodología:** Se trata de una revisión integrativa de la literatura, realizada en las bases de datos Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE/PubMed), SciELO y Google Académico, considerando publicaciones en el período de 2020 a 2025. Se utilizaron descriptores controlados del DeCS combinados mediante operadores booleanos: Ancianos (Aged) AND Polifarmacia (Polypharmacy) AND Cuidados de Enfermería (Nursing Care).

**Resultados:** Se identificaron 225 estudios en las bases de datos. Tras la aplicación de los criterios de inclusión y exclusión y la lectura de títulos y resúmenes, quedaron 33 artículos. Tras la eliminación de duplicados, 27 estudios fueron seleccionados para lectura completa, resultando en una muestra final de 12 artículos que cumplieron con el objetivo de la investigación.

**Conclusión:** La polifarmacia se configura como un importante desafío para la salud de la población anciana, siendo un fenómeno multifactorial asociado a la presencia de enfermedades crónicas, al envejecimiento fisiológico y a las fragilidades en la atención en



salud. Se evidencia el papel fundamental de la enfermería en la prevención de eventos adversos, mediante estrategias como la consulta de enfermería basada en el Proceso de Enfermería, la educación en salud y la Sistematización de la Asistencia de Enfermería, contribuyendo a un cuidado más seguro y a la mejora de la calidad de vida de la persona anciana.

**Palabras clave:** Polifarmacia. Anciano. Enfermería. Salud Pública.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The process of population aging is growing all over the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the elderly person is one who belongs to the age group of 65 years older in developed countries and 60 years older in developing countries, as is the case of Brazil. According to the last demographic census, carried out in 2022 by the Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the country has approximately 32 million elderly people, which corresponds to 15.8% of the total population (Brasil, 2023).

Population aging is associated with several factors, such as the reduction in the fertility rate and the increase in life expectancy and the growth of chronic non-communicable diseases, which contributes to the growing use of health services and multiple medications of continuous use by the same individual, a condition known as polypharmacy (Oliveira; Brito; Siqueira, 2020).

Polypharmacy is defined as the concomitant use of four or more simultaneous medications by the same individual, and is a common practice among elderly people. Although it can bring therapeutic benefits, its inappropriate use is associated with significant risks, such as adverse reactions, drug interactions, and increased morbidity and mortality (Macêdo et al., 2023). According to Oliveira; Brito; Siqueira (2020) approximately 93% of the elderly over 65 years of age in Brazil use at least one drug and about 18% use five or more drugs simultaneously.

In this context, the role of nursing in the care of the elderly is highlighted, especially with regard to the safe use of medications. The changes inherent to aging interfere with pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, increasing vulnerability to adverse events. Thus, it is essential that nurses consider the specificities of each individual, such as clinical, functional, and sociodemographic aspects, in order to plan and implement safe and effective care (Cavalcante et al., 2022).

In view of the above, this study aims to describe the impact of polypharmacy on the health of the elderly and to analyze nursing approaches aimed at preventing adverse events.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

It is an integrative literature review, a method that enables the synthesis of available evidence on the chosen topic, contributing to evidence-based practice and identification of gaps in knowledge (Macêdo et al., 2023).

This study was conducted in six stages: (1) identification of the theme and formulation of the guiding question; (2) definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (3) literature search; (4) selection of studies; (5) analysis and interpretation of the results; (6) Submission of the

review.

The guiding question was: How does polypharmacy impact the health of the elderly and what nursing approaches can be adopted to prevent adverse events related to the concomitant use of multiple medications?

The search was carried out in the MEDLINE/PubMed, SciELO and Google Scholar databases, considering publications in the period from 2020 to 2025. Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) were used, combined by operators: Elderly (Aged) AND Polypharmacy AND Nursing Care (NursingCare).

The inclusion criteria were: articles published between 2020 and 2025, available in full, in Portuguese and English, and that directly addressed the topic. Theses, dissertations, monographs, opinion articles and duplicate studies were excluded.

The selection of studies occurred through the reading of titles, abstracts and full texts. Initially, 225 studies were identified, of which 33 met the inclusion criteria. After excluding duplicates, 27 studies remained for full reading, resulting in a final sample of 12 articles.

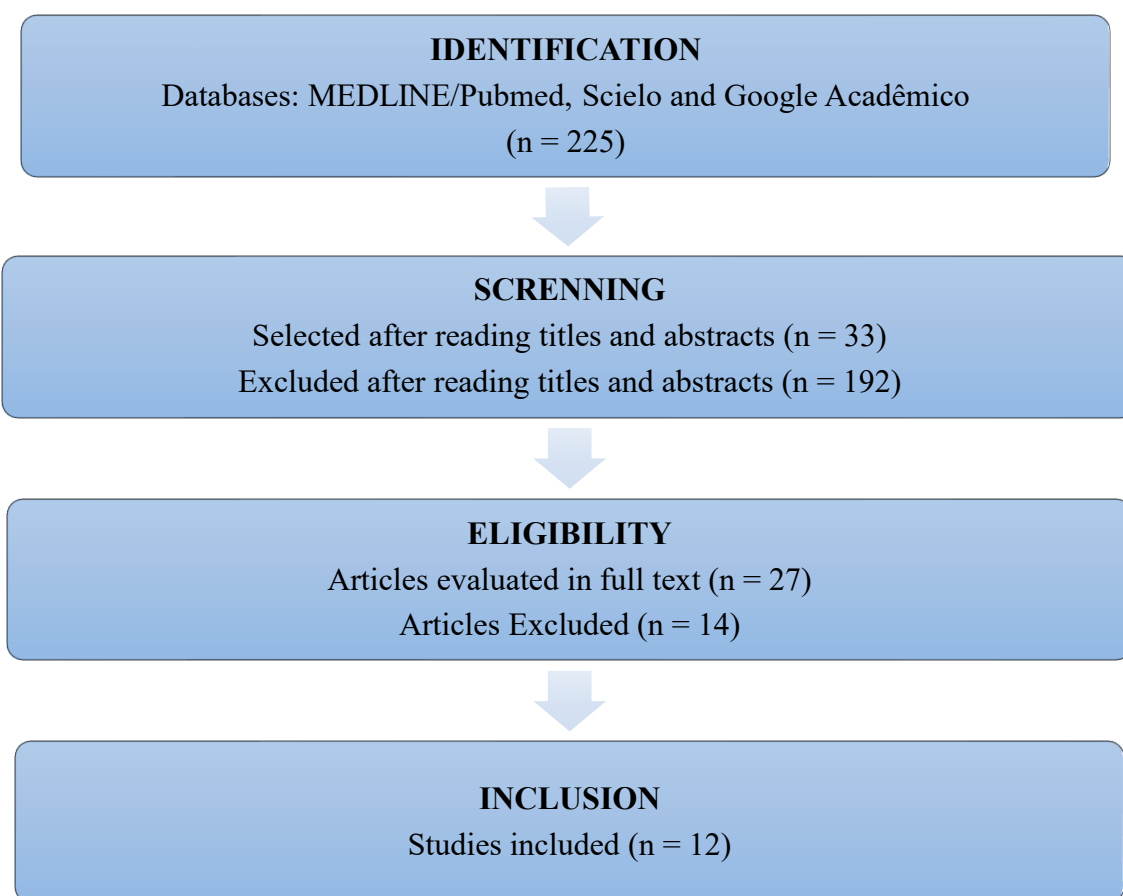
The results were presented based on the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), adapted for integrative review. The study did not require approval by the Research Ethics Committee, as it used secondary data available in databases in the public domain, respecting the ethical principles established by Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council.

### **3 RESULTS**

The articles selected for this study were described following the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), as shown in the flowTable (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA flowTable of the article selection process*



Source: Authors, 2026

After the completion of the article selection process, as shown in the PRISMA flowTable, the articles were systematized and organized according to year of publication, authorship, methodology, objective and results found, as shown in Table 1.

The analysis allowed the organization of the findings into two thematic categories: impacts of polypharmacy on the health of the elderly and nursing strategies for the prevention of adverse events.

**Table 1**

*Selected articles on polypharmacy in the elderly and nursing approaches, 2020 to 2025*

Author Year	Title	Methodology	Objective	Result
Leal, R. C. et al. 2020	Polypharmacy in the elderly: the role of nursing in the prevention of iatrogenic diseases	Descriptive study	To identify the use of medication by the elderly in a Basic Family Health Unit from the perspective of care in the prevention of iatrogenic diseases	Polypharmacy with the use of drugs to lower blood pressure and hypoglycemic drugs by the elderly, inferring the educational importance of health professionals, especially nurses, in helping the elderly to minimize possible

				iatrogenic events that polypharmacy can cause.
Oliveira, RP et al. 2020	Systematization of nursing care in the prevention of drug interactions among elderly people in polypharmacy.	Integrative literature review	To describe the Systematization of Nursing Care (NCS) in the prevention of drug interactions (DI) among elderly people in polypharmacy.	The use of NCS as a strategy for caring for the elderly in polypharmacy in the context of DI prevention is essential, and the Nursing Process should be applied to these individuals as a form of disease prevention.
Rodrigues, DS et al. 2021	Impacts caused by polypharmacy in the elderly: an integrative review.	Descriptive review	To identify the impacts caused by polypharmacy in the elderly.	The use of several medications, combined or not with other forms of supplementary health care, is a common practice in the elderly and is frequently described in the literature as a current difficulty due to complications and their impacts on health care costs.
Cavalcante, AS et al. 2022	Nursing care based on Virginia Henderson's theory for the elderly using polypharmacy.	Theoretical-reflective study	To list the main nursing diagnoses, outcomes and interventions according to Virginia Henderson's theory for the elderly who use polypharmacy	The diagnoses raised were ineffective self-management of health, risk of falling, risk of dysfunctional gastrointestinal motility, risk of impaired liver function, and risk of electrolyte imbalance.
Canteri, VA et al. 2023	Nursing care for the elderly using polypharmacy.	Literature review	To review the scientific publications on nursing care for the elderly using polypharmacy, and to highlight the importance of nursing in the face of the problem presented.	Nurses are indispensable for promoting the quality of life of the elderly, therefore, the need for qualification of these professionals is evident.
Macedo, VMF et al. 2023	Nursing care in primary care with elderly people undergoing polypharmacy treatment.	Integrative review	To identify in the scientific literature which care strategies are used by nurses with elderly people undergoing polypharmacy treatment in primary care.	The main strategies found were: motivational interviewing; integrated intervention; educational intervention; integrated review of medications; guided care; periodic nursing consultation.
Souza, AES et al. 2023	Nursing role in reducing risks associated with the use of polypharmacy in the elderly.	Scoping Review	To investigate the role of Nursing in reducing risks in the use of polypharmacy in the elderly.	The performance of the nursing professional is essential to minimize the damage caused by the simultaneous use of several medications, as well as, in the administration, adequate scheduling, monitoring and planning of the

				medication routine, seeking to reduce polypharmacy and promoting a lifestyle favorable to active aging.
France, JMM; Felicio, LR 2024	Polypharmacy in the elderly: impacts and prevention from the nurse's perspective.	Literature review	To analyze the impact of polypharmacy on population aging and to identify prevention strategies from the perspective of nurses.	There is a need for a more active role of nurses in geriatric polypharmacy, being a key player in the identification, prevention and minimization of risks.
Arruda, M.A. et al. 2025	Prevention of Polypharmacy in the Elderly in Primary Health Care: a literature review.	Integrative literature review	To identify in the scientific literature the strategies used by nurses with the elderly to prevent polypharmacy in Primary Health Care.	The nurse can reduce the appearance of adverse reactions and drug interactions, providing safer and more effective care to the elderly.
Jesus, JC et al. 2025	Polypharmacy: strategies used by nurses to reduce the impacts on the health of the elderly	Literature review	To identify the strategies used by nurses during nursing consultations, in order to reduce the specific effects of polypharmacy on the health of the elderly.	Among the main goals, we highlight the guidance on the dangers linked to the excessive use of medications, the identification of actions to minimize these problems, in addition to the creation of educational practices aimed at the elderly and their caregivers.
Lago, P.A. et al. 2025	Impacts of Polypharmacy on the Quality of Life of Elderly People: an integrative literature review.	Integrative literature review	To analyze what has been published scientifically about the interference of the use of polypharmacy in the quality of life of elderly people living in the community	A total of 7 articles were found that showed a decrease in the quality of life of elderly people using polypharmacy, enhanced by the lack of adequate follow-up. Communication between health professionals and patient is essential to minimize the risks of polypharmacy.
Melo, ALFM et al. 2025	The impact of polypharmacy on the health of the elderly: nursing approaches.	Literature search	To analyze, based on the scientific literature, the effects of polypharmacy on the health of the elderly population, as well as to identify strategies for the promotion of the rational use of medicines and the reduction of therapeutic risks	Polypharmacy is highly prevalent among the elderly and represents an important public health problem.

Source: Authors, 2026

## 4 DISCUSSIONS

When analyzing the studies, it was found that polypharmacy in the elderly is multifactorial, closely linked to the aging of the population, the presence of chronic diseases and fractionation of the care offered in primary care. Rodrigues *et al.*, (2021); Lago *et al.*, (2025) and Melo *et al.*, (2025) agree that the use of several drugs significantly increases the risk of adverse reactions, drug interactions, decreased quality of life, and increased hospitalizations.

Arruda *et al.*, (2025) and França; Felício (2024) agree that the prevention of polypharmacy should be planned through strategies carried out and developed in primary care, always with the concern of periodically reviewing prescriptions and continuous monitoring of the elderly. In this sense, Jesus *et al.*, (2025) and Souza *et al.*, (2023) highlight that the nurse's performance is essential in this process, especially through health education and continuous monitoring of the correct use of drugs, evidencing an alignment between studies and the role of nursing.

Regarding systematized care, Canteri *et al.* (2023), Macêdo *et al.* (2023) and Oliveira *et al.* (2020) agree that the Systematization of Nursing Care (NCS) and the Nursing Process are fundamental tools for identifying risks related to polypharmacy. In addition, they argue that its application enables a comprehensive assessment of the elderly, favoring the implementation of safer and more individualized interventions.

Cavalcante *et al.* (2022) expand this discussion by basing care on Virginia Henderson's theory, highlighting the importance of meeting basic human needs and contributing to a more patient-centered and humanized approach. This approach reinforces the importance of nursing care that considers the biopsychosocial dimensions of the elderly using polypharmacy, aligning with the need for comprehensive care.

Although there is consensus regarding the negative impacts of polypharmacy, authors such as Leal *et al.*, (2020) and Rodrigues *et al.*, (2021) point out important gaps, such as lack of standardized protocols and lack of integration between the multiprofessional health team, which can negatively affect the safety of the elderly.

In the field of public policies, Informative Note No. 5/2023 reinforces the right to comprehensive care for the elderly, which is in line with the principles of the National Health Policy for the Elderly (PNSPI), which establishes the promotion of healthy and active aging. However, it was found in the studies analyzed that there are still challenges in the implementation of these guidelines, especially with regard to the organization of services and training of professionals for the correct management of elderly people who use polypharmacy.

In view of this, the implications for nursing practice are visible, and the nursing consultation becomes a strategic moment aimed at identifying problems related to the use of drugs, which allows the implementation of educational actions and strengthening of self-care. In addition, the nursing process contributes to safer clinical decision-making, encouraging the reduction of diseases, in addition to improving the quality of life of the elderly.

Thus, it was evident that although there have been advances in the understanding of polypharmacy and its impacts, it is still necessary to strengthen care practices, expand research and invest in continuing education aimed at health professionals, with the objective of ensuring more comprehensive, safe and effective care for the elderly population.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

Polypharmacy is an important challenge for the health of the elderly population, being associated with an increased risk of adverse events, hospitalizations, drug interactions, and compromised quality of life. It was evidenced that this is a multifactorial phenomenon, mainly related to the presence of chronic diseases, physiological aging and weaknesses in health care.

In this context, the relevance of nursing approaches in the prevention of these diseases is highlighted, highlighting the essential role of nurses in the early identification of risks, in the promotion of the rational use of medications and in the continuous monitoring of the elderly, especially in the context of Primary Health Care. Strategies such as nursing consultations based on the Nursing Process and health education actions are important tools for reducing iatrogenic events and strengthening self-care.

In addition, the nurse plays a central role in the articulation of care, contributing to a humanized, integral and safe approach, aligned with the guidelines of public policies aimed at the health of the elderly. Thus, this study synthesizes relevant evidence for the field of nursing, by reinforcing the importance of professional qualification, the organization of health services and the expansion of care strategies aimed at the safe use of drugs.

Finally, the need to strengthen care practices and investment in continuing education is highlighted, as well as the expansion of scientific production on the subject, in order to support more effective interventions that reduce the impacts of polypharmacy and promote the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly population.

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