

# Cognitive Frailty and Mortality in a National Cohort of Older Adults: the Role of Physical Activity

Irene Esteban-Cornejo, PhD; Verónica Cabanas-Sánchez, PhD;  
Sara Higuera-Fresnillo, MSc; Francisco B. Ortega, PhD; Arthur F. Kramer, PhD;  
Fernando Rodriguez-Artalejo, MD, PhD; and David Martinez-Gomez, PhD

## Abstract

**Objective:** To examine the association between cognitive frailty and long-term all-cause mortality and the stratified and combined associations of physical activity and cognitive frailty with long-term all-cause mortality in a population-based cohort of older adults from Spain.

**Patients and Methods:** A representative cohort of 3677 noninstitutionalized individuals from Spain aged 60 years or older was recruited between April 17, 2000, and April 28, 2001, with follow-up through December 28, 2014. Information on self-reported physical activity and cognitive frailty status were collected at baseline. Analyses were performed with Cox regression after adjustment for confounders.

**Results:** The median follow-up was 14 years (range, 0.03-14.25 years), corresponding to 40,447 person-years, with a total of 1634 deaths. The hazard ratio (HR) for all-cause mortality among participants with cognitive frailty compared with robust participants was 1.69 (95% CI, 1.43-2.01). Being active was associated with a mortality reduction of 36% (95% CI, 21%-47%) in cognitively frail individuals. Compared with those who were robust and active, participants with cognitive frailty who were inactive had the highest mortality risk (HR, 2.13; 95% CI, 1.73-2.61), which was equivalent to being 6.8 (95% CI, 5.33-7.99) years older.

**Conclusion:** Cognitive frailty was more markedly associated with increased mortality in inactive older adults, and being active reduced the mortality risk among cognitively frail individuals by 36%. These novel results highlight that engaging in physical activity could improve survival among cognitively frail older adults.

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Cognitive impairment and physical frailty are independently associated with a higher risk of adverse health outcomes, including hospitalization, disability, and mortality.<sup>1</sup> Cognitive impairment ranges in severity from mild to severe because of the deterioration in several domains (eg, memory, learning, and/or executive function), and physical frailty represents a state of increased vulnerability to stressor events resulting from reduced capacity in multiple physiologic systems. Both aging indicators also share some pathogenic mechanisms such as brain alterations, hormonal dysregulation, chronic inflammation, and

oxidative stress.<sup>2,3</sup> In fact, physical frailty has consistently been linked to cognitive impairment, dementia, and Alzheimer disease.<sup>4-6</sup> On this basis, an international consensus group has developed the concept of cognitive frailty as a heterogeneous clinical manifestation characterized by the simultaneous presence of both physical frailty and cognitive impairment, in the absence of dementia.<sup>7</sup>

Cognitive frailty seems to entail a greater death risk than physical frailty or cognitive impairment separately, as reported in both community-based<sup>8-12</sup> and population-based<sup>13,14</sup> studies. Interestingly, despite the

From the Center for Cognitive and Brain Health, Department of Psychology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA (I.E.-C., A.F.K.); PROFITH "PRoMoting FITness and Health through physical activity" Research Group, Department of Physical Education and Sports, Faculty of Sport Sciences, University of Granada, Spain (I.E.-C., F.B.O.); Research Centre in Physical Activity, Health and Leisure (CIAFEL), Faculty of Sport, University of

*Affiliations continued at the end of this article.*

potential effect of regular physical activity to slow cognitive decline<sup>15,16</sup> and its association with lower mortality in nonfrail individuals,<sup>17,18</sup> no previous studies have investigated whether and to what extent physical activity could attenuate the effect of cognitive frailty on mortality. Accordingly, this study examined (1) the association between cognitive frailty and long-term all-cause mortality over 14 years and (2) the stratified and combined associations of physical activity and cognitive frailty with long-term all-cause mortality in a population-based cohort of older adults from Spain.

## PATIENTS AND METHODS

### Study Design and Participants

Data were obtained from the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid cohort, a representative cohort of the noninstitutionalized population aged 60 years and older in Spain. Detailed information about the study methods have been reported elsewhere.<sup>19,20</sup> In brief, study participants were selected between April 17, 2000, and April 28, 2001, with follow-up through December 28, 2014, using probabilistic sampling by multistage clusters. The clusters were stratified according to region of residence and size of municipality. Next, census sections and households were randomly selected within each cluster. Finally, study participants were selected in the households according to age and sex strata. Baseline information was collected at the participants' homes through personal interviews and physical examination by trained and certified personnel. The study response rate was 71%, with a total of 4008 individuals (2269 women) recruited.<sup>19,20</sup> After missing data were excluded, the present analysis included 3677 individuals (92% of the original sample).

Written informed consent was obtained from study participants and from one family member. The study was approved by the Clinical Research Ethics Committee of La Paz University Hospital in Madrid, Spain.

### Cognitive Frailty Phenotype

The International Academy of Nutrition and Aging and the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics established a first definition for cognitive frailty in older adults in 2013.<sup>7</sup> The proposed diagnostic criteria for this novel and heterogeneous clinical age-related condition included the simultaneous presence of physical frailty and mild cognitive impairment (MCI) without a concurrent diagnosis of Alzheimer or other dementias. Since that time, several criteria have been proposed to determine both physical frailty and MCI.<sup>8-14</sup> In the present study, we used the FRAIL scale (fatigue, resistance, ambulation, illness, and loss of weight) to assess physical frailty<sup>21</sup> and the Mini-Mental Status Examination (MMSE) to assess MCI,<sup>22</sup> excluding those who were diagnosed with Alzheimer or other dementias at baseline or died in the subsequent 2 years from Alzheimer or other dementias.

### Physical Frailty

Physical frailty was assessed with the FRAIL scale.<sup>21,23</sup> Fatigue, resistance, and ambulation were identified with the following questions from the 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey questionnaire.<sup>24</sup>

Fatigue: "During the last 4 weeks, did you feel tired?" Possible responses were (1) all of the time, (2) most of the time, (3) a good bit of the time, (4) some of the time, (5) a little bit of the time, and (6) none of the time. Participants were deemed to be fatigued when they responded "all of the time" or "most of the time."

Resistance: "In a typical day, does your health now limit you in climbing one flight of stairs?" Response options were (1) yes, limited a lot, (2) yes, limited a little, and (3) no, not limited at all. Resistance was defined as either of the first 2 responses.

Ambulation: "In a typical day, does your health now limit you in walking several blocks?" Response options were (1) yes, limited a lot, (2) yes, limited a little, and (3) no, not limited at all. Ambulation was considered to be affected when either of the first 2 responses was provided.

Illness and weight loss were self-reported. Illness was defined as having 5 or more of the following self-reported physician-diagnosed conditions: (1) asthma or chronic bronchitis, (2) hypertension, (3) coronary heart disease, (4) stroke, (5) osteoarthritis or rheumatism, (6) pneumonia, (7) diabetes mellitus, (8) depression with drug treatment, (9) hip fracture, (10) Parkinson disease, and (11) cancer at any site. Weight loss was defined as unintentional loss of 5% or more of body weight within the preceding 12 months.

The physical frailty score ranges from 0 to 5.<sup>23</sup> Individuals with zero criteria were considered physically robust, those with scores of 1 to 2 were categorized as prefrail, and those with 3 or more criteria were considered frail. For analytic purposes, we merged prefrail and frail individuals into a single category, as has been performed in other recent studies.<sup>1,25</sup>

### Mild Cognitive Impairment

Cognitive function was assessed with the MMSE,<sup>26</sup> which has been adapted and validated for use in the Spanish population.<sup>22</sup> The MMSE includes 7 domains (orientation to time, orientation to place, registration, attention and calculation, recall, language, and visual construction), and its score ranges from 0 to 30. Higher scores indicate better cognitive functioning. For this analysis and similar to previous studies, a score of 25 or less was considered MCI.<sup>1,26,27</sup>

### Operationalizing Cognitive Frailty

As in previous studies,<sup>1,13,25</sup> participants were classified into 4 groups according to physical frailty and cognitive function: (1) robust: those without physical frailty (ie, nonprefrail/frail) and without MCI, (2) physical prefrailty: physically frail individuals (ie, prefrail/frail) without MCI, (3) cognitive prefrailty: individuals without physical frailty (ie, nonprefrail/frail) but with MCI, and (4) cognitive frailty: those with physical frailty (ie, prefrail/frail) and MCI.

### Physical Activity

Physical activity was assessed with a single question taken from the Spanish National Health Survey, which is used to monitor the prevalence of physical activity in Spain.<sup>20,28</sup> Participants self-reported their leisure time physical activity level as (1) inactive, (2) occasional, (3) several times a month, and (4) several times a week. Responses correlate well with results from the well-validated questionnaire used in the Nurses' Health Study and the Health Professionals' Follow-up Study for assessing physical activity in older adults (Spearman correlation coefficient,  $\rho=0.55$ ; the mean physical activity level in metabolic equivalent task h/wk was 7.1 (95% CI, 6.2-8.1) for the inactive category, and 30.0 (95% CI, 28.9-31.0), 43.1 (95% CI, 36.3-50.0), and 56.6 (95% CI, 37.6-75.5) for the occasional, several times a month, and several times a week categories, respectively).<sup>28</sup> Participants were classified as physically inactive (ie, inactive category) and physically active (ie, occasionally, monthly, and weekly categories).<sup>20</sup>

### Ascertainment of Mortality

The outcome variable for the present study was all-cause mortality from study baseline to the end of follow-up on December 31, 2014. Mortality data were obtained from the National Death Index, which contains information on the vital status of all residents in Spain. The vital status was ascertained for 99.9% of the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid cohort.<sup>29</sup>

### Covariates

Sex, age, and the highest educational level attained (no formal education, primary, and secondary or higher) were recorded. Tobacco consumption was reported as never, former, or current smoking. Alcohol consumption status was obtained with the scale used in the Spanish National Health Survey, which collects the frequency and quantity of beer, wine, and spirits consumed during the past year to calculate total alcohol intake; the cutoff point between moderate and excessive consumption was

alcohol intake of 30 g/d or less in men and 20 g/d or less in women.<sup>30</sup> Participants were classified as abstainers, former drinkers, moderate drinkers, and excessive drinkers. Body height and weight were measured using standardized procedures, and body mass index was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. Waist circumference was measured with a nonelastic belt-type tape at the midpoint between the lowest rib and the iliac crest after breathing out normally.<sup>19</sup>

### Statistical Analyses

Baseline characteristics of the study participants by cognitive frailty status are presented as mean  $\pm$  SD or percentages, as appropriate. Mortality risk according to cognitive frailty status was summarized with hazard ratios (HRs) and their 95% CIs, obtained using the Cox proportional hazards regression model. Robust individuals were used as reference in the analyses. Regression models were adjusted for sex, age, educational attainment, smoking, alcohol consumption, body mass index, and waist circumference.

We used similar Cox models to examine the stratified association of physical activity (ie, active vs inactive as a reference category) and mortality by cognitive frailty status. Preliminary analysis revealed no significant interaction between physical activity and cognitive frailty status in relationship to mortality risk ( $P=.110$  for interaction). Then, we examined the combined association of physical activity (ie, active vs inactive) and cognitive frailty status (robust, physical prefrailty, cognitive prefrailty, and cognitive frailty) with mortality by building 8 categories of exposure (ie, 2 physical activity categories  $\times$  4 cognitive frailty categories) and taking those who were robust and physically active as the reference category.

We calculated rate advancement periods to estimate the difference in survival in cognitively frail inactive individuals vs robust active individuals that is equivalent to increasing chronological age; as such, we divided the  $\beta$  coefficient for mortality in those cognitively frail inactive individuals

vs robust active individuals by the  $\beta$  coefficient for mortality associated with each yearly increase in age.

We checked the assumption of proportionality of hazards both visually and by testing the statistical significance of the interaction of cognitive frailty status and physical activity with time of follow-up. No evidence was found of departure from the proportional hazards assumption (all  $P>.1$ ). Statistical significance was set at 2-sided  $P<.05$ . Analyses were performed with Stata statistical software, version 14 for Windows (StataCorp).

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Characteristics

Table 1 shows the baseline characteristics of the study sample. Overall, 832 of the 3677 study participants (22.6%) had cognitive frailty. Compared with robust individuals, age, percentage of women, lower education, never smokers, and alcohol abstainers increased across categories of cognitive frailty. However, the MMSE score decreased across categories (all  $P<.05$ ).

### Association Between Cognitive Frailty and All-Cause Mortality

The median follow-up was 14 years (range, 0.03-14.25 years), corresponding to 40,447 person-years, with a total of 1634 deaths. Figure 1 shows the cumulative survival according to cognitive frailty status. The multivariate HRs (95% CIs) for all-cause mortality among participants with physical prefrailty, cognitive prefrailty, and cognitive frailty compared with robust participants were 1.42 (1.21-1.66), 1.34 (1.11-1.61), and 1.69 (1.43-2.01), respectively.

### Stratified Association Between Physical Activity and All-Cause Mortality by Cognitive Frailty Status

Table 2 shows the association between physical activity and mortality risk stratified by cognitive frailty status. In cognitively frail individuals, those who were physically active vs inactive had significantly lower mortality (HR, 0.64; 95% CI, 0.53-0.79;  $P<.001$ ), but

TABLE 1. Characteristics of the Study Sample, Stratified by Cognitive Frailty Status<sup>a,b</sup>

Variable	All (N=3677)	Robust (n=1370)	Physical prefrailty (n=897)	Cognitive prefrailty (n=578)	Cognitive frailty (n=832)
Women	2058 (56.0)	630 (45.3)	517 (57.7)	322 (55.6)	599 (72.0)
Age (y)	71.50±7.78	68.81±6.23	71.41±7.70	72.10±7.41	75.61±8.54
Education level					
No education	1873 (50.9)	450 (32.8)	433 (48.3)	384 (66.4)	607 (72.9)
Primary	1314 (35.7)	616 (45.0)	337 (37.5)	163 (28.2)	198 (23.8)
Secondary or higher	490 (13.4)	304 (22.2)	127 (14.2)	31 (5.4)	27 (3.3)
Body mass index (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	28.92±4.50	28.52±4.00	29.41±4.60	28.57±4.39	29.30±5.12
Waist circumference (cm)	98.88±12.03	98.29±11.19	99.70±12.60	98.21±11.52	99.42±13.01
Smoking					
Never	2416 (65.7)	782 (57.1)	601 (67.0)	389 (67.2)	645 (77.5)
Former	892 (24.3)	414 (30.2)	217 (24.2)	127 (22.0)	134 (16.1)
Current	369 (10.0)	174 (12.7)	79 (8.8)	62 (10.8)	53 (6.4)
Alcohol consumption					
Abstainer	1812 (49.3)	532 (38.9)	483 (53.8)	283 (49.0)	514 (61.8)
Former	428 (11.6)	124 (9.0)	118 (13.2)	76 (13.2)	109 (13.1)
Moderate	1068 (29.1)	529 (38.6)	219 (24.4)	157 (27.1)	163 (19.6)
Excessive	369 (10.0)	185 (13.5)	77 (8.6)	62 (10.7)	46 (5.5)
Physical frailty criteria					
Fatigue	434 (11.8)	0	202 (22.5)	0	231 (27.8)
Resistance	1305 (35.5)	0	607 (67.7)	0	698 (84.0)
Ambulation	1226 (33.4)	0	600 (66.9)	0	626 (75.3)
Illness	61 (1.7)	0	30 (3.3)	0	32 (3.8)
Weight loss	73 (2.0)	0	38 (4.2)	0	35 (4.3)
Physical frailty score	0.84±1.03	0	1.65±0.71	0	1.95±0.76
MMSE score	25.30±4.77	28.36±1.36	28.02±1.33	21.73±3.55	19.80±4.92
MMSE score ≤25	1409 (38.3)	0	0	100	100
Physically active	2106 (57.3)	1003 (73.2)	432 (48.1)	384 (66.5)	288 (34.6)

<sup>a</sup>MMSE = Mini-Mental State Examination.

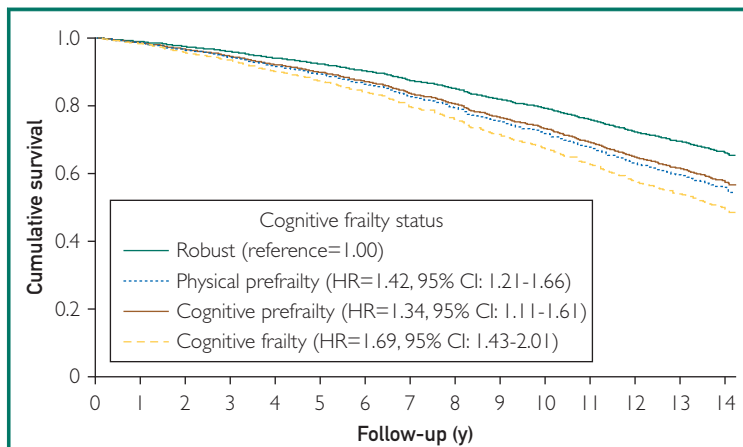
<sup>b</sup>Data are presented as mean ± SD or No. (percentage) of participants.

this association did not achieve statistical significance for the rest of cognitive frailty categories (robust,  $P=.163$ ; physical prefrailty,  $P=.057$ ; cognitive prefrailty,  $P=.083$ ).

### Combined Association of Physical Activity and Cognitive Frailty With All-Cause Mortality

Figure 2 presents the combined association of physical activity and cognitive frailty status with mortality risk. Compared with those who were robust and active, participants with cognitive frailty who were inactive had the highest mortality risk (HR, 2.13; 95% CI, 1.73-2.61). In addition, excess mortality in active participants with cognitive frailty (HR, 1.34; 95% CI, 1.06-1.70)

was markedly smaller than in inactive participants with cognitive prefrailty (HR, 1.72; 95% CI, 1.33-2.23) or with physical prefrailty (HR, 1.63; 95% CI, 1.33-2.01). By contrast, cognitively prefrail active participants (HR, 1.29; 95% CI, 1.02-1.64) and physically prefrail active participants (HR, 1.38; 95% CI, 1.12-1.69) had excess mortality fairly similar to their robust inactive counterparts (HR, 1.17; 95% CI, 0.92-1.70). Lastly, we found a more marked dose-response relationship between cognitive frailty categories and mortality risk for the inactive participants, namely, the mortality risk increased with advancing cognitive frailty categories (Figure 2A). The rate advancement period analysis revealed that



**FIGURE 1.** Cumulative survival according to cognitive frailty status in 3677 older adults. Analyses were adjusted for sex, age, educational level (no education/primary/secondary or higher), smoking (never/former/current), alcohol consumption (abstainer/former/moderate/excessive), body mass index, and waist circumference. HR = hazard ratio; Ref. = reference group (robust and physically active individuals). Error bars indicate 95% CI.

compared with robust active individuals, the mortality risk of those with cognitive frailty who were inactive was equivalent to being 6.8 years older (95% CI, 5.33-7.99) in chronological age (Figure 2B). All individual and combined analyses were repeated after excluding participants with depression, and the strength of the associations did not materially change (data not shown).

## DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study were that (1) cognitive frailty was associated with increased mortality more markedly in the inactive older adults and (2) being physically active may reduce the mortality risk among cognitively frail individuals by 36%. These novel results highlight that engaging in physical activity could improve vital prognosis among cognitively frail older adults.

Most studies investigating the effect of cognitive frailty on mortality were conducted in community-based settings.<sup>8-12,31</sup> These studies found that those who were both physically frail and cognitively impaired had the highest risk of mortality,<sup>8-12</sup> except the study by Jacobs et al,<sup>31</sup> in which the effect of physical frailty was more marked than the effect of cognitive impairment in

models including both factors. Only 3 studies were population based.<sup>13,14,32</sup> Cano et al<sup>32</sup> reported that physical frailty was a stronger predictor of mortality than cognitive impairment (ie, MMSE score  $\leq 21$ ), and no additional mortality risk was found for cognitive frailty. The other 2 studies found that cognitive frailty was associated with increased mortality independent of the cognitive criteria used (ie, positive response to item 14 of the 30-item Geriatric Depression Scale or MMSE score  $< 26$ ).<sup>13,14</sup> Solfrizzi et al<sup>14</sup> found that cognitive frailty was associated with a 75% increased risk of mortality over a period of 3.5 years and a 40% increased risk over a period of 7 years. Feng et al<sup>13</sup> reported that cognitive frailty conferred additional greater risk for mortality than either physical frailty or isolated cognitive impairment; specifically, the risk of mortality related to cognitive frailty (ie,  $\geq 1$  Fried criteria and MMSE score  $< 26$ ) was approximately 90% higher over a period of 10 years. Importantly, despite the differences in measures of cognitive frailty used, the operationalization of its 2 components (ie, physical frailty and cognitive impairment), the setting of the studies, or the sociodemographic characteristics of the study population, cognitive frailty seems to increase the risk of mortality in older adults.

Our study results are consistent with previous findings in that cognitively frail individuals were at the highest risk of mortality (around 70%) over a period of 14 years. In addition, those with cognitive frailty had about a 30% higher death risk than those with only cognitive prefrailty or physical prefrailty, highlighting the cumulative effect of cognitive frailty on mortality. This finding suggests that cognitively frail individuals, characterized as prefrail/frail individuals (ie,  $\geq 1$  FRAIL criteria) with MCI (MMSE score  $\leq 25$ ), were the most vulnerable to risk of mortality, which provides strong support for the prognostic validity of cognitive frailty. The prevalence of cognitive frailty operationalized as aforementioned was 22.6%, higher than in previous studies with ranges from 1.0% in population-based studies to 22.0% in clinical-based studies.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 2. Stratified Association Between Physical Activity and Mortality Risk in 3677 Study Participants, Stratified by Cognitive Frailty Status<sup>a</sup>

Cognitive frailty status	All-cause mortality			
	All	Deaths	Hazard ratio (95% CI)	P value
Robust				
Inactive	368	131	1 (reference)	...
Active	1003	300	0.83 (0.64-1.08)	.163
Physical prefrailty				
Inactive	465	228	1 (reference)	...
Active	432	194	0.81 (0.65-1.01)	.057
Cognitive prefrailty				
Inactive	194	98	1 (reference)	...
Active	384	180	0.76 (0.56-1.04)	.083
Cognitive frailty				
Inactive	544	358	1 (reference)	...
Active	287	144	<b>0.64 (0.53-0.79)</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

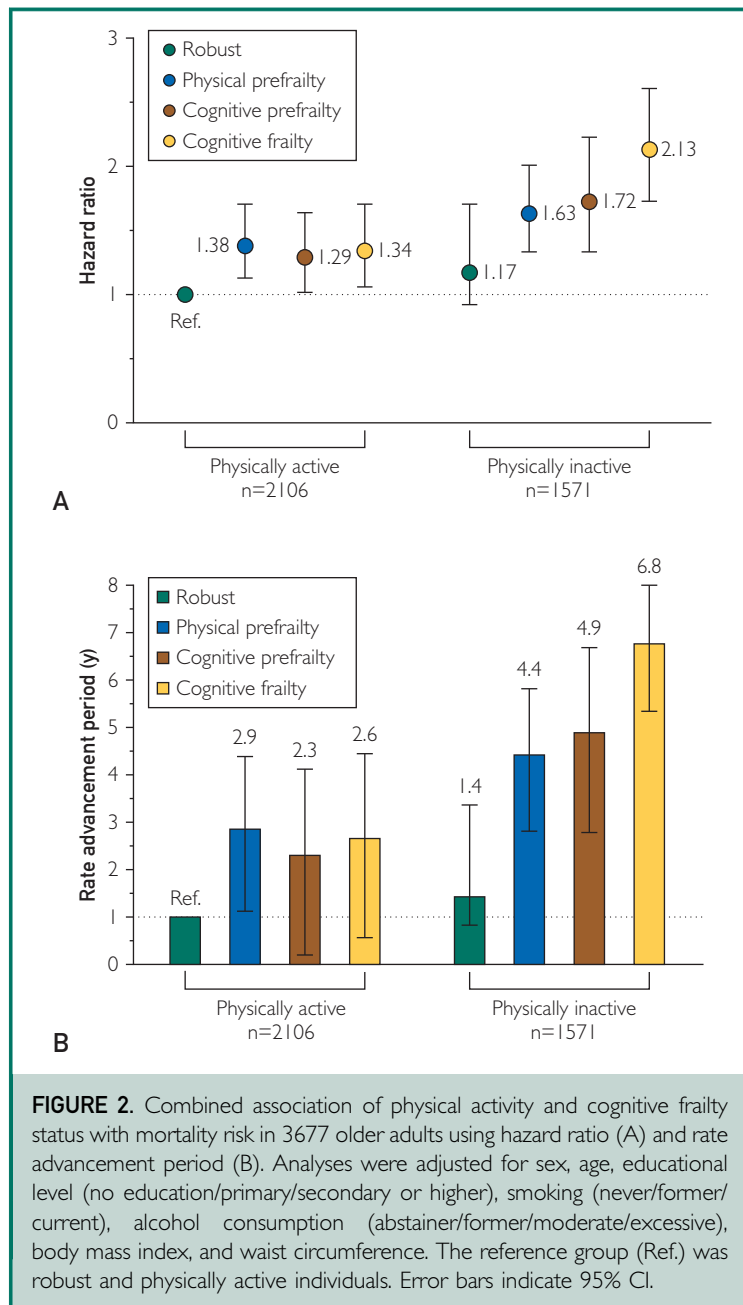
<sup>a</sup>Analyses were adjusted for sex, age, educational level (no education/primary/secondary or higher), smoking (never/former/current), alcohol consumption (abstainer/former/moderate/excessive), body mass index, and waist circumference. Statistically significant values are shown in bold.

However, further research is needed to standardize the operationalization of cognitive frailty and determine its subsequent effect on mortality.

There are several pathways that may lead from cognitive frailty to death, including hormonal, inflammatory, and vascular mechanisms influencing both physical frailty and cognitive impairment.<sup>33,34</sup> First, decreased levels of sex steroids (eg, testosterone) and growth hormones (eg, brain-derived neurotrophic factor [BDNF]). Testosterone and BDNF produce cognitive protection by increasing synapse plasticity at the hippocampus; importantly, both testosterone and BDNF tend to decrease in physically frail individuals.<sup>35,36</sup> Conversely, increased cortisol is associated with reduced hippocampal volume and defective response to stressors by dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis in frail elderly people.<sup>37</sup> Second, increased levels of inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein or interleukins are implicated in motor dysfunction, cognitive impairment, and dementia, which may strengthen the diagnosis of cognitive frailty.<sup>38,39</sup> Last, atherosclerotic disease reduces blood flow to the brain and skeletal muscle. Particularly, white matter hyperintensities (ie, leukoaraiosis) reflect chronic blood flow reduction linked

to cognitive deficits, gait disorders, and impaired balance leading to cognitive impairment and physical frailty and in turn to higher mortality.<sup>40</sup> Taken together, the determination of the aforementioned factors may be useful for early detection of cognitive frailty, although further research is necessary to better understand the neurobiological basis of cognitive frailty and ultimately increase survival.

Interestingly, we found a dose-response relationship between cognitive frailty categories and mortality risk for the inactive participants (ie, the mortality risk increased with advancing cognitive frailty categories) and that physical activity could reduce long-term mortality among cognitively frail older adults. Rate advancement periods highlight the clinical implications of the data by showing that, compared with a robust active individual, a cognitively frail inactive individual had on average a mortality rate equivalent to being almost 7 years older. These findings are extremely important because they provide the first empirical evidence about the impact of physical activity on mortality in cognitively frail individuals. However, in our study the prevalence of physical inactivity in cognitively frail individuals was around 65%. Therefore, promoting physical activity among cognitively frail



elderly persons is crucial because they have room for improvement and it may increase their survival.

Evidence on physical activity interventions among cognitively frail individuals is very scarce, but a small number of studies point to the cognitive benefits of physical activity.<sup>1</sup> In particular, in randomized control trials, physical exercise in combination

with other strategies (eg, diet or cognitive training)<sup>41,42</sup> or alone<sup>43</sup> improved cognitive outcomes in physically frail and prefrail states, opening new routes for the prevention and management of cognitive and functional decline in these individuals. Of note, in our study, active individuals with cognitive frailty had lower mortality than inactive counterparts with physical prefrailty, highlighting that physical activity was particularly relevant in the cognitively frail elderly. Exercise-based randomized trials should assess the most effective type of exercise program with the optimal intensity, volume, and frequency that would improve functional and cognitive capacity and reduce mortality in the cognitively frail elder.<sup>44</sup>

Our study has some limitations. First, the observational design limits a causal interpretation of the study associations, particularly for physical activity and cognitive frailty that were assessed at the same time point. Physical activity was self-reported and is thus prone to measurement error. Future research should consider using objective measures of physical activity, such as accelerometry. Lastly, although the international consensus group separated prefrailty from frailty,<sup>7</sup> we merged both categories into a single entity as has been performed in other recent studies<sup>1,25</sup> and to obtain a higher power in the analyses. Indeed, inclusion of the prefrail state may allow for reversing cognitive frailty through appropriate interventions, which is supported by a home-based program that prevents functional decline in older adults with moderate frailty but not in those with severe frailty.<sup>44</sup> In addition, a previous study found that the risk of dementia among older adults with MCI was similar in prefrail and frail individuals.<sup>8</sup>

Strengths of our study include a relatively large and representative sample, the long follow-up, and the population-based setting, which minimizes selection bias. Also, study data were collected by trained staff using standardized methods. Moreover, analyses were adjusted for a good number of covariates, which reduces residual confounding.



## CONCLUSION

In this study, the cognitive fragility phenotype, namely the coexistence of both physical frailty and cognitive impairment, was associated with increased mortality, more marked in the inactive older adults. However, physical activity may attenuate 36% of the increased risk of mortality among cognitively frail individuals. This research may have important implications because the levels of physical activity are dramatically reduced in the elderly while cognitive and physical functioning decline is naturally occurring. From a public health perspective, promoting a physically active lifestyle could be one of the main strategies against cognitive frailty-related mortality. However, further longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to shed light on the importance of physical activity to decrease mortality in cognitively frail individuals.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the study participants who made this study possible.

**Abbreviations and Acronyms:** **BDNF** = brain-derived neurotrophic factor; **FRAIL** = fatigue, resistance, ambulation, illness, and loss of weight; **HR** = hazard ratio; **MCI** = mild cognitive impairment; **MMSE** = Mini-Mental Status Examination

**Affiliations (Continued from the first page of this article):** Porto, Portugal (V.C.-S.); Department of Physical Education, Sport and Human Movement, Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain (V.C.-S., S.H.-F., D.M.-G.); Beckman Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana (A.F.K.); Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, School of Medicine, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid/IdiPAZ and CIBER in Epidemiology and Public Health (CIBERESP), Madrid, Spain (F.R.-A.); and IMDEA Food Institute, CEI UAM + CSIC, Madrid, Spain (F.R.-A., D.M.-G.).

**Grant Support:** This work was supported in part by the Instituto de Salud Carlos III, State Secretary of R+D+I and FEDER/FS (FIS grants 12/1166 and 16/609), MINECO R+D+I grant DEP2013-47786-R, the FRAILOMIC Initiative (European Union FP7-HEALTH-2012-Proposal No. 305483-2), the ATHLOS project (European project H2020-Project ID: 635316), a grant from the Alicia Koplowitz Foundation (I.E.-C.), an FPI grant from Autonomous University of Madrid (S.H.-F.), and a 'Ramon y Cajal' contract (RYC-2016-20546) (D.M.-G.).

**Potential Competing Interests:** The authors report no competing interests.

**Correspondence:** Address to Irene Esteban-Comejo, PhD, Department of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Sport Sciences, University of Granada, Camino de Alfacar s/n 18071, Granada, Spain ([ireneesteban@ugr.es](mailto:ireneesteban@ugr.es)).

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