This paper summarizes the evidence constituting the foundation for preventive and health promotive work performed by nurses in primary care. This is a systematic literature review in six scientific databases. Forty original articles and 16 literature reviews met the inclusion criteria. After both authors independently read the articles, 25 were excluded and 15 included. One article was judged to be of high quality, five of medium quality and 10 of low quality. The articles of high and medium quality focused on alcohol counselling, coronary heart disease and diabetes. Of the 16 literature reviews from the Cochrane Library, 10 were found to be relevant and presented evidence. The subjects included smoking cessation, breast-feeding, prevention of falls among the elderly, asthma in children, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Few studies in the area of prevention and health promotion are of adequate scientific quality, resulting in limited evidence for the effects of interventions.