

Searching the Cochrane Databases <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com>

What is the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is a collection of six databases that contain different types of high-quality, independent evidence to inform healthcare decision-making. It is widely regarded as the gold standard in evidence based healthcare. The databases are all concerned with the effectiveness of interventions for a given health care problem.

When should I use the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is useful for answering the following types of queries:

- **What is the effectiveness of treatment X in condition Y?**
What is the effectiveness of atenolol in high blood pressure?
- **Is treatment A better than treatment B?**
Are angiotensin II receptor blockers more effective than betablockers in treating hypertension?
- **What is an effective intervention to achieve outcome Z?**
What are the most effective strategies for encouraging weight loss?

The Cochrane Library is not useful for answering the following types of information:

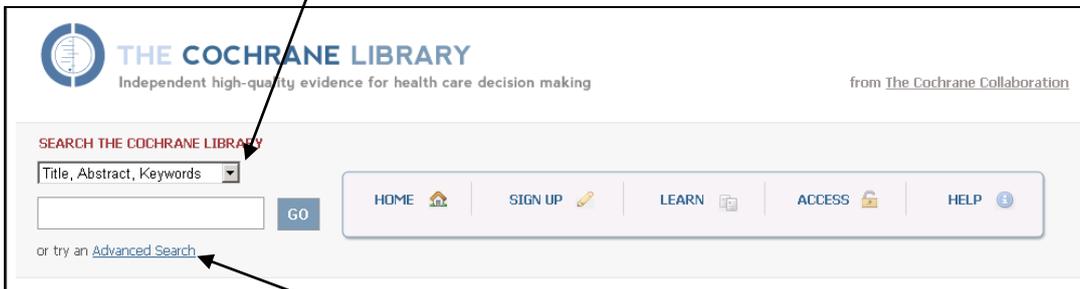
- General healthcare information - cause, prognosis, epidemiology or risk factors for an illness
- Statistical information – prevalence or incidence
- Current or primary research other than RCTs
- Guidelines

The six databases are:

- Cochrane Reviews – **Databases of Systematic Reviews**. Full text systematic reviews of health care interventions carried out following the protocols laid out by the Cochrane Collaboration.
- Other Reviews – **Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE)**. Structure abstracts of systematic reviews published elsewhere which meet minimum quality criteria. Publication details for the original article are given.
- Clinical trials – **Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)** is a major bibliographic index of clinical trials. Contains citations and abstracts.
- Methods Studies – **Cochrane Methodology Register (CMR)**, a bibliography of publications which report on methods used on the conduct of clinical trials.
- Technology Assessments – **Health Technology Assessment Database (HTA)** contains details of ongoing projects and completed publications from health technology organisations.
- Economic Evaluations – **NHS Economic Evaluation Database** – NHS EED contains structured abstracts of articles describing economic evaluations of health care interventions. Papers are included if they provide a comparison of treatments and examine both the costs and outcomes of the alternatives.

Search

From the Cochrane homepage it is possible to do a simple search, selecting which fields you would like the terms to appear in from the dropdown menu.



However selecting the advanced search option will give more options to direct your search.

Advanced search

Search tab.



The search tab allows you to enter terms you would like to match in a variety of fields including title, abstract and keyword. The fields can be selected using the drop down menus.

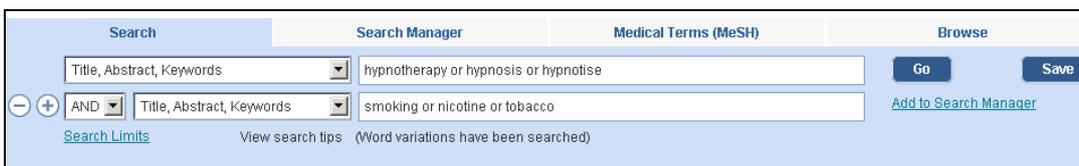
Click the plus symbol to add up to 5 lines to your search (longer search strategies can be built in the Search Manager tab).

You can limit your search by date range, record statuses or database, and also prevent word variations being included via Search Limits.

Search tips

1. You can use **and** and **or** to combine subjects within a search line.

It is advisable to use **or** (for synonyms) within the search line, and combine the lines representing different concepts in the search with **and**. (This helps to prevent errors in combining the searches if you are just using the search tab ... more complex search strategies can be constructed in the search manager tab).



2. To search for a phrase, enter it in quotes, e.g. "Breast cancer"

3. Plurals are automatically searched for (unless you choose to turn off word variations in Search Limits).

4. Truncation/wildcard is available, e.g. ***eclampsia** retrieves **eclampsia**, **pre-eclampsia** and **preeclampsia** or **wom*n** retrieves **woman** or **women**
5. Use near to find records where these words are close (within 6 words of each other) e.g. **nicotine near replacement**

Medical Terms (MeSH) tab.

Most records in the Cochrane Library have Medical Subject Headings assigned. MeSH headings can be added to search strategies via the Medical Term tab.

Enter a term and click on **'Lookup'** to find subject headings related to that word. Under the heading **Thesaurus matches** (left hand column) you will be presented with a list of MeSH headings where your term appears, including possibly one or more **Exact term matches**.

Database	Count
Cochrane Reviews	55
Other Reviews	123
Trials	4652
Methods Studies	0
Technology Assessments	27
Economic Evaluations	110
Cochrane Groups	0

The display gives information about the matching of the term – it can be useful to look through the list as it can give further ideas which maybe relevant to the search.

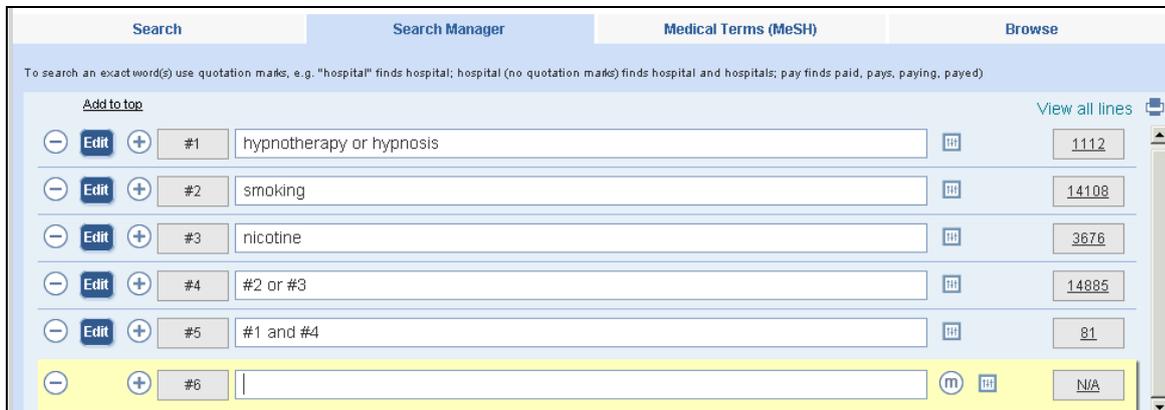
If more than one **Exact term match** is given you will need to select one in order for the trees and results to be displayed. If a term in the **Phrase match** or **Any word match** seems more useful clicking on the relevant heading will display the related trees and results.

The relevant **MeSH trees** are displayed in the central column. If you want to search for the subject and all its narrower terms, select the **Explode all trees** radio button (this is the default setting) E.g. dementia and also all the more specific varieties of the disorder such as: Alzheimers, vascular dementia, Picks disease ... If you just want the single subject select **'Single MeSH term (unexploded)'**.

The number of hits in each of the databases is given in the right hand column. You can then **View Results**, or if you wish to add the MeSH heading to a broader search strategy click **Add to Search Manager**.

Search Manager

Any searches carried out under the Search tab and the MeSH tabs can be added to the Search Manager tab via the **Add to Search Manager** link. Here you have more options for building and managing searches. You can also search directly in Search Manager.



The screenshot shows the Search Manager interface with four tabs: Search, Search Manager (selected), Medical Terms (MeSH), and Browse. Below the tabs is a search instruction: "To search an exact word(s) use quotation marks, e.g. 'hospital' finds hospital; hospital (no quotation marks) finds hospital and hospitals; pay finds paid, pays, paying, payed)". There is an "Add to top" link and a "View all lines" link. The main area contains a list of search terms with their IDs and result counts:

ID	Search Term	Result Count
#1	hypnotherapy or hypnosis	1112
#2	smoking	14108
#3	nicotine	3676
#4	#2 or #3	14885
#5	#1 and #4	81
#6		N/A

You can combine previous searches using their ID numbers as shown above (the # must be included) You can also edit search lines you have previously run.

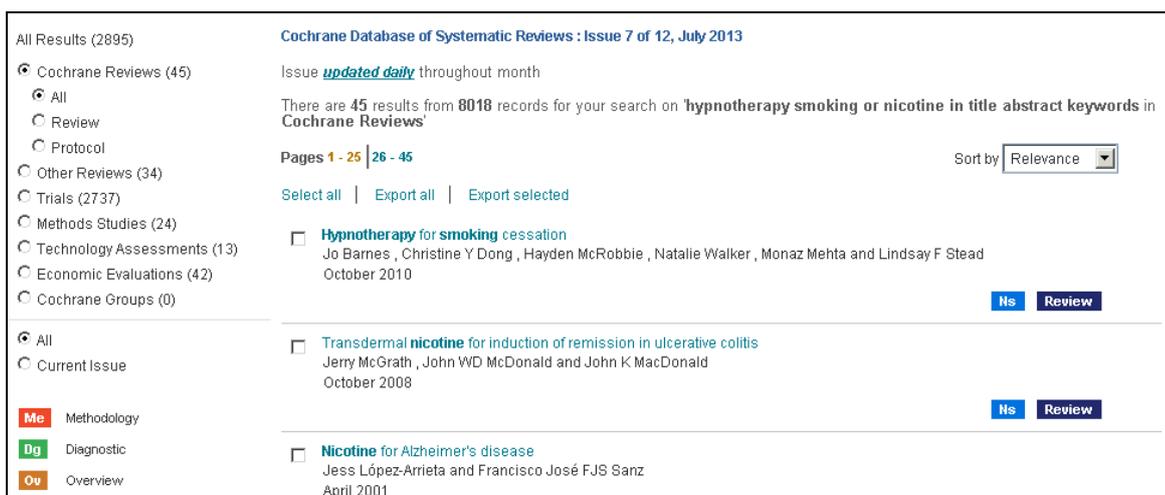
Add MeSh terms to your search by clicking on . Apply limits using .

Click on the numbers in the grey boxes to the right to see the results for that line of the search.

Results in Cochrane

The results from each of the six databases are listed separately. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews are displayed as the default option, and sorted by relevance. The options in the left hand column allow you to display the results from the other Cochrane databases. Each record is annotated to indicate whether it is new, withdrawn, has reached new conclusions – a key is given in the left hand column.

Clicking on the title will take you to the full database record, with links to related full text documents or details of research in progress where available.



The screenshot shows the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews search results page. The title is "Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews : Issue 7 of 12, July 2013". The search criteria are "hypnotherapy smoking or nicotine in title abstract keywords in Cochrane Reviews". There are 45 results from 8018 records. The results are sorted by Relevance. The left hand column shows the search filters: All Results (2895), Cochrane Reviews (45), All (selected), Review, Protocol, Other Reviews (34), Trials (2737), Methods Studies (24), Technology Assessments (13), Economic Evaluations (42), Cochrane Groups (0). The right hand column shows the search results:

Key	Title	Authors	Date	Buttons
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hypnotherapy for smoking cessation	Jo Barnes , Christine Y Dong , Hayden McRobbie , Natalie Walker , Monaz Mehta and Lindsay F Stead	October 2010	Ns Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Transdermal nicotine for induction of remission in ulcerative colitis	Jerry McGrath , John WD McDonald and John K MacDonald	October 2008	Ns Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nicotine for Alzheimer's disease	Jess López-Arrieta and Francisco José FJS Sanz	April 2001	

Printing or saving your results

To save or print your results, tick the records you would like to keep, and click **Export selected**. Choose **PC** or **Mac** and **Citation** or **Citation and Abstract** from the dropdown menus in the new window. This will create a plain text file which can then be saved or printed.