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Searching the Cochrane Library Helpsheet



Getting Started

The Cochrane Library can be accessed remotely from the **e-Resources** page on the RSM website: <https://www.rsm.ac.uk/e-resources.aspx> by logging in to the **Databases** using your registered RSM username and password. Once the databases opening screen has loaded, click on the **Cochrane Library** link in the bottom right corner. Alternatively, go directly to: <https://www.cochranelibrary.com>

You can search and save results anonymously but to also save your search strategies and set-up search alerts, register your own username and password within the Cochrane Library. Use the **Sign In** function in the top right corner of any screen to create a personal username and password.

What is the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is a collection of databases providing the best available evidence about the effects of healthcare. There are 3 main databases in total including the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials.

To find out more about the different databases that form the Cochrane Library, how to navigate their records and full-text access options, please refer to the **About the Cochrane Library Helpsheet**.

Browsing the Cochrane Library

Use the links provided on the homepage to view a list of Cochrane Reviews by topic, by Cochrane Review Group, highlighted reviews or the current issue for a list of newly added, updated and withdrawn reviews. Click on the **Editorials** and **Special Collections** tabs to view topical reviews. All Cochrane Reviews are labelled with their status: full Review, Protocol (reviews in progress), New, Conclusions Changed, New Search, Major Change, Update, or Withdrawn. A review also shows if a Comment has been added by a reader. You can also browse the other databases (except Trials) by clicking on the links provided on the top purple toolbar. In any of the lists displayed, click on the title to go through to the database's record (e.g. a Cochrane review).

Searching the Cochrane Library

Click on the **Advanced Search** button to reach this screen containing all the tools required to search the databases.

The screenshot shows the Cochrane Library homepage with the 'Advanced Search' section highlighted. Annotations include:

- Textword search**: Points to the 'Search' button in the 'Advanced Search' section.
- Browse by database**: Points to the 'Medical terms (MeSH)' button in the 'Advanced Search' section.
- Create complex search strategies & combine sets**: Points to the 'Search manager' button in the 'Advanced Search' section.
- Thesaurus Search (MeSH)**: Points to the 'Medical terms (MeSH)' button in the 'Advanced Search' section.

From the **Advanced Search** screen, the Cochrane Library can be searched using textwords (**Search** tab or **Search Manager** tab) and MeSH (**Medical Terms (MeSH)** tab). It is important to note that when searching the Cochrane Library, you automatically search all databases at once.

Textword Searching

Select the **Search** tab. Enter a word or phrase into the **Search** box. By default the search is by **Title Abstract Keyword**, but you can select other options by clicking on the drop-down menu. Click on the **Run Search** button to immediately display the results on the screen. However, if you wish to build search strategies, click on the **Send to Search Manager** button to add the textword search to the **Search Manager** tab.

Develop your search using the following search tips:

Truncation

To search for all words beginning with a particular stem (which must be at least 3 characters long), you can use the truncation symbol * (asterisk).

Example: **arter*** will retrieve artery, arteries, arterial, etc.

Linking Search Terms

It is possible to link terms in several ways to make your search broader or more focussed. Use one or more of the following:

OR

OR specifies that at least one of the terms must be present in documents retrieved. Use OR to group synonyms or alternative terms. **Example:** **heart or cardiac**

NEXT

NEXT specifies that all terms must appear adjacent to each other, in the specified order, in documents retrieved. Use this for exact phrases. **Example:** **acne next vulgaris**
Please note: Alternatively, enclose terms in double quotation marks (e.g. "**chronic fatigue syndrome**") if not using truncation as part of the phrase.

NEAR/n

NEAR/n specifies that all terms must appear within a specified number (n) of words of each other, in any order, in documents retrieved. **Example:** **breast near/3 cancer** (finds 'breast cancer' as well as 'cancer of the breast')

AND

AND specifies that all terms must be present in each of the documents retrieved. Use AND to connect concepts. **Example:** **diabetes and gout**

NOT

NOT specifies that a term must not be present in documents retrieved. Use NOT to exclude information you have already viewed, or an unrelated topic (**otherwise use with caution**). **Example:** **aids not hearing**

(...)

Terms in parentheses (brackets) are processed first. If you mix different links, you must use parentheses to ensure the correct search logic.

Example: **(hiv or aids) and cotrimoxazole**

Thesaurus Searching (MeSH)

Many records in the Cochrane Library are indexed using MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) as used in Medline.

Searching using MeSH terms can increase the precision of your search. However, to ensure retrieval of all records on a subject, it is important to do a combination of textword and thesaurus searching.

Click on the **Medical Terms (MeSH)** tab in the **Advanced Search** screen. Type in a word or phrase in the **Enter MeSH term** box and click on the **Lookup** button. The thesaurus will display all terms that contain your chosen word or phrase. Select the term that most closely matches your interest (it displays in black type). If a specific match is not found, review the terms under the left column **Thesaurus Matches** for suggestions.

Terms are displayed in 'trees' ordered in a hierarchy of broader and narrower terms (**MeSH Trees**). Terms with a **+** (plus) sign followed by a number can be exploded. The plus sign signifies there are a number of narrower (more specific) terms available to search. Clicking on such a term will display the narrower terms.

Some terms may be included in more than one tree. To search on one term in a tree, select the MeSH term and tick **Single MeSH term (unexploded)**. To search on all the terms included in one or more trees, tick the checkbox next to the trees followed by **Explode selected trees**, or tick **Explode all trees** to include all trees. Click on the **Select** button to apply these limits.

To also add one or more qualifiers (subheadings) to a MeSH term, click on the **Select subheadings/qualifiers** box to the right of the search box, choose qualifiers from the drop-down menu and click on **Lookup** to apply them.

Finally, click on the **View Results** button to display the search results or add the MeSH search to **Add to Search Manager** button to build search strategies.

Combining Sets

Search sets can only be combined by adding textword or MeSH searches to the **Search Manager** tab first. To combine search sets, click on the **Search Manager** tab. Use the search set number (including the preceding # character) and the appropriate operator.

Example: **#1 and #2** (see set 3 below)

| | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| #1 | MeSH descriptor: [Asthma] this term only | MeSH | 10553 |
| #2 | MeSH descriptor: [Eczema] this term only | MeSH | 845 |
| #3 | #1 and #2 | | 41 |

AND

The Boolean operator AND narrows search queries. Retrieved records contain all terms.

Example: **asthma and eczema**

OR

The Boolean operator OR widens search queries. Retrieved records can contain either term.


Example: **asthma or eczema**

NOT

The Boolean operator NOT excludes terms from search queries. Example: **asthma not eczema**

Limiting Sets

Limits are accessible using the **Search Limits** button in the

Search tab or by clicking on the  icon next to a search line in the **Search Manager** tab. Tick checkboxes next to specific limits listed by Cochrane database (Content type), Cochrane Review Group or date of publication. Click on **Apply Limits** and then, the **Run Search** button to run the search using the selected limits.

Displaying Results

If in the **Search Manager** tab, click on the result count for a search line and the results will display at the bottom of the screen. At the top of the results display, the results are divided between the different databases. The number below the database's name indicates the number of records that match the search in that database. Click on the link tab to see the results for a particular database. Results are ordered by relevancy but may be changed to sort by title or date. Use quick filters located on the left hand panel to refine your results depending on the database (e.g. Cochrane Reviews can be filtered by publication date, review status, review type or topic). To view an individual document listed in the results, click on the title which is a link. The document will be displayed in a new browser tab.

Saving Records

For individual Cochrane Reviews, click on the **View PDF** link on the top right of the review's screen to view each one in full-text. Use this feature to determine how many pages a review has, before printing or saving it from here.

Records from the other databases can be saved to citation/abstract level only. Within a database, the **Select All** checkbox will tick all records in the search for saving. Alternatively, click on the checkboxes next to each record to select individual records and then, click on the **Export Selected Citation(s)** link. You will be prompted to select your **Export Format** (e.g. Plain Text, RIS) and click on the **Include Abstract** checkbox (not available for the Clinical Answers database). Click on the **Download** button to give your file a name and save it to your local drive.

Saving the Search History

Single line searches that have been run in the **Search** or **Medical Terms (MeSH)** tabs can be saved by clicking on the **Save Search** button. The search can be reused at a later date by clicking the **View Searches** or **View Saved Searches** button respectively.

To save a multi-line search, go to the **Search Manager** tab and click on the drop-down menu beside the **Save This Search** button to select the **Save As** option. Enter a name for your search strategy as prompted and then, click on the **Save As** button. The name of the search strategy will appear at the top of the page. Click on the **View Saved Searches** button to access a list of your saved search strategies. From here, click on the **Load** link to run a saved strategy. You can also click the **E-mail Alert** checkbox if you would like to be notified when new articles matching your search are added to the Cochrane Library. **Please note:** You can also use the **Print** button at the top of your search strategy to view or save a text version of it with result counts.

Help

For further details on using the Cochrane Library, click on the **Search Help** link in any of the search tabs or the **How to use Cochrane Library** option from the **Help** drop-down menu on the top purple toolbar.

Exiting the Cochrane Library

When you have finished using the Cochrane Library, close down your web browser to exit.

Please contact us if you require any further assistance using the databases or wish to book a tutorial. Contact details are provided in the banner of this helpsheet.