

Searching the Cochrane Library

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Learning objectives

At the end of this session you should be able to:

- Identify when to use Cochrane
- Log on to the Cochrane Library databases from home and work
- Formulate a search string, using basic Boolean logic
- Search using Keywords and MeSH terms
- Use the search history function to combine search results
- Refine search criteria by author or title
- View records from each database and navigate through a review
- Print records from each database
- View graphs and tables from a review

What is the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is a database of reliable evidence on the effectiveness of healthcare interventions. It is regarded as the best resource available of this type. The Cochrane Library is put together by the Cochrane Collaboration, the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination and other related organisations and is updated quarterly.

When should you use the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library should be used when looking for the best evidence on the effectiveness of treatment and health promotion interventions. The best type of evidence comes from systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials (RCTs). It is also a source of information on the methodology of systematic reviews.

It should be used when looking for information on the effectiveness of an intervention, for example:

- What is the effectiveness of treatment y?
- What is the effectiveness of treatment x in condition z?
- Is treatment y better than treatment x?
- Are there any systematic reviews of stroke rehabilitation effectiveness?

The Cochrane Library should not be used for the following:

- General healthcare information
- Guidelines for clinical practice or audit procedures
- Primary research (other than systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials)
- Questions relating to the cause, prognosis, epidemiology or risk factors for an illness or disease¹

¹ Ask your local health librarian if you need advice on where to search for this type of information

Overview of the Cochrane Library databases

The Cochrane Library consists of several different databases:

The main databases

- **Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (Cochrane Reviews)**
Database of completed, full text systematic reviews carried out by the Cochrane Collaboration, plus 'protocols' (reviews currently in progress)
- **Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness (Other Reviews)**
Database of structured abstracts of other systematic reviews from alternative sources of literature
- **Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (Clinical Trials)**
Detailed references to randomised controlled trials identified through searching databases such as Medline and Embase, as well as hand searching journals

Other databases

- **Cochrane Database of Methodology Reviews (Methods Reviews)**
Contains full text, ongoing and completed reviews of methodological studies
- **Cochrane Methodology Register (Methods Studies)**
Bibliography of publications on how to conduct reviews and trials
- **Health Technology Assessment Database (Technology Assessments)**
Database of information on healthcare technology assessments
- **NHS Economic Evaluation Database (Economic Evaluations)**
Database contains structured abstracts of articles describing economic evaluations of healthcare interventions
- **About the Cochrane Collaboration (Cochrane Groups)**
Contains information about the work of the Collaboration and lists the Cochrane Review Groups with their contact details.

When you search the Cochrane Library, you will search all the databases at once. You are able to decide which database you want to view the results in.

Accessing the Cochrane Library

1. The Cochrane Library may be accessed from the Library website at: www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/lis (or if you are in East Surrey or Crawley hospitals click on *Library Service* from the Intranet and click on *Electronic resources*. Click on *Cochrane Library*).
2. Or directly from: www.thecochranelibrary.com

Access is available to everyone, without requiring a username and password. It is possible to create an account if you wish to save your searches.

Planning your search

Before starting any search you should first decide exactly what you want to search for and from what perspective. A useful method of doing this uses the acronym PICO²:

P atient, problem or population	Age, sex, race, condition or disease, care setting, etc
I ntervention	Type of intervention e.g. test, therapy or clinical procedure
C omparison	Alternative interventions, if applicable
O utcomes	Measurement, result, effect

This will allow you to form your search strategy and give you keywords.

For example, if you are looking to find out whether antibiotics are effective in the management of severe asthma, the keywords you would need to search for are *antibiotics* and *asthma*

Conducting a keyword search

A keyword search will search for a particular word or phrase anywhere in the text of documents in all the databases.

When keyword searching it is necessary to consider as many alternative terms and synonyms as you can for your topic (e.g. Heart attack, Myocardial infarction, MI etc.)

To keyword search, select **Advanced Search**.



² PICO can be a helpful tool, but should not dictate your search.

Enter the term(s) in the search box.

To search for reviews or trials with your search terms anywhere in the text select **Search All Text** from the drop down menu.

Click on **Search** to carry out the search.

The screenshot shows a search interface with a table of search terms and their corresponding 'In:' dropdown menus. The search terms are 'asthma', 'child*', and 'corticosteroid', with 'AND' operators between them. The 'In:' dropdowns are set to 'Search All Text', 'Search All Text', and 'Search All Text' respectively. A 'Search' button and a checkbox for 'Go directly to Search History' are at the bottom. A tip box on the right explains that 'AND' and 'NOT' can be selected from the pulldown selection boxes or entered directly within the search text boxes. It also provides an example: (colchicine AND liver) AND (fibrosis OR cirrhosis).

Search For:	In:
asthma	Search All Text
AND child*	Search All Text
AND corticosteroid	Search All Text
AND	Abstract
AND	Keywords

Search Go directly to Search History

Tip No. 2:
The AND operator is used by

You may find a lot of 'false hits' (documents which contain your search terms in the text but these terms are not the main focus of the review).

To search for reviews or trials which have your search term in the title, abstract or as 'keywords' select **Title, Abstract, Keywords** from the drop down menu.

The screenshot shows the same search interface as above, but the 'In:' dropdown menus are now set to 'Title, Abstract or Keywords', 'Title, Abstract or Keywords', and 'Title, Abstract or Keywords' respectively. The 'Search' button and 'Go directly to Search History' checkbox are still present. The tip box on the right is the same as in the previous screenshot.

Search For:	In:
asthma	Title, Abstract or Keywords
AND child*	Title, Abstract or Keywords
AND corticosteroid	Title, Abstract or Keywords
AND	Abstract
AND	Keywords

Search Go directly to Search History

Tip No. 2:
The AND operator is used by

Each database will then indicate the number of references found.

The screenshot shows the search results page. The title is 'Search Results'. Below it, it says 'Show Results in:' followed by a list of databases and their respective counts: Cochrane Reviews [99], Other Reviews [14], Clinical Trials [219], Methods Reviews [0], Methods Studies [1], Technology Assessments [2], Economic Evaluations [9], and Cochrane Groups [1]. Below this, it says 'There are 99 results out of 4320 records for: "asthma in All Fields and child*" in All Fields and corticosteroid in All Fields'. There is a 'Save Search' button.

Search Results

Show Results in:
[Cochrane Reviews \[99\]](#) | [Other Reviews \[14\]](#) | [Clinical Trials \[219\]](#) | [Methods Reviews \[0\]](#) | [Methods Studies \[1\]](#) | [Technology Assessments \[2\]](#) | [Economic Evaluations \[9\]](#) | [Cochrane Groups \[1\]](#)

There are 99 results out of 4320 records for: "asthma in All Fields and child*" in All Fields and corticosteroid in All Fields [Save Search](#)
in The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

Search Tips

- To search for a phrase you must enter it in quotes e.g. "smoking cessation"
- Truncation can make keyword searching more effective and comprehensive. Use the * symbol at the end of a word to search for different endings e.g. depress*. (Will search depression, depressed etc.)
- Internal truncation may also be used to search for different spellings e.g. p*diatric. (Will search paediatric and pediatric)

MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) Searching

MeSH is a controlled thesaurus. It is used to index articles on the same subject in the same way. When you search using the database's thesaurus you will only retrieve records that are about that subject, not those which merely mention the word. This means that you will retrieve more relevant results. In order to conduct a comprehensive search it is best to search using both keywords and MeSH.

To search using MeSH click on **MesH Search** from the front page or from the Cochrane Advanced Search page.

[Advanced Search](#) | [MeSH Search](#) | [Search History](#) | [Saved Searches](#)

Enter your term in the search box, and click on **Thesaurus**. This brings up a list of terms, select the one most appropriate.

Search for a MeSH descriptor

Enter MeSH term:

Search term or explode

Search this term only will select the main heading (in this case Asthma).
Explode will broaden your search to include any narrower terms (in this case Asthma, Exercise-Induced and Status Asthmaticus).

Explosive

All	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Tree Number 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Respiratory Tract Diseases [+14]
Tree Number 2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bronchial Diseases [+10]
Tree Number 3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Asthma [+2]
Tree Number 4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Asthma, Exercise-Induced
		Status Asthmaticus
		Bronchial Fistula
		Bronchial Hyperreactivity
		Bronchial Neoplasms
		Bronchial Spasm
		Bronchiectasis [+1]
		Bronchitis [+2]
		Bronchogenic Cyst
		Bronchopneumonia
		Tracheobronchomegaly
Search this term only	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Click in the **Go directly to search history** box and press **View Results** to be taken to your search history so far.

Your search history will appear displaying a list of the searches done so far. To view the results click on the link.

Combining results

The Cochrane Library gives three options to connect your search results together:

- AND will combine all terms
- OR will combine similar terms into one big group
- NOT will exclude term from the search

To combine, enter #(line number) and #(line number) in the search box e.g. #1 and #2. Then click on **Go**

Search For:

The combined results will appear in your search history. To view the results of your combined results click on the link

Current Search History

ID	Search	Hits	Edit	Delete
#1	asthma in All Fields, from 1800 to 2005 in all products	13371	edit	delete
#2	MeSH descriptor Anti-Bacterial Agents explode all trees in MeSH products	12911	edit	delete
#3	(#1 AND #2)	76	edit	delete

Displaying Results

To view results from a particular database, click on the title of that database. Click on **Record** to open the review you want and the review will be displayed in full on screen.

Search Results

Show Results in:
Cochrane Reviews [56] | [DARE \[10\]](#) | [CENTRAL \[1738\]](#) | [Methodology Reviews \[0\]](#) | [HTA \[6\]](#) | [NHS EED \[28\]](#) | [About \[1\]](#)

There are 56 results out of 3659 records for: "asthma in All Fields and child in Record Title, from 1800 to 2004 in The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews"

View: [1-25](#) | [26-50](#) | [51-56](#)

[Export All Results](#)

Record Information Restrict to: [Reviews](#) | [Protocols](#) Sort by: **Record Title**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Anti-cholinergic therapy for acute asthma in children B Satish, N McDonald, A Bara Year: 2001 Record
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anti-IgE for chronic asthma in adults and children S Walker, M Montell, K Phelan, TJ Lasserson, EH Walters Year: 2004 Record

Click **Record** to see full text

Select database to view results

The symbol indicates a full review is available

The symbol indicates a protocol (the review is still in progress)

Reviews can be long, use the headings of the review, which are outlined in the index on the left hand side of the screen, to navigate your way through the document. To return to your list of records click on your browsers **Back** button.

To see the conclusions of the review click on **Authors' / Reviewers' conclusions**

- [Results](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Reviewers' conclusions](#)

To display the meta-analysis of trials data click on **Figures (full size)**

[Figures \(full size\)](#)

[Tables](#)

Printing

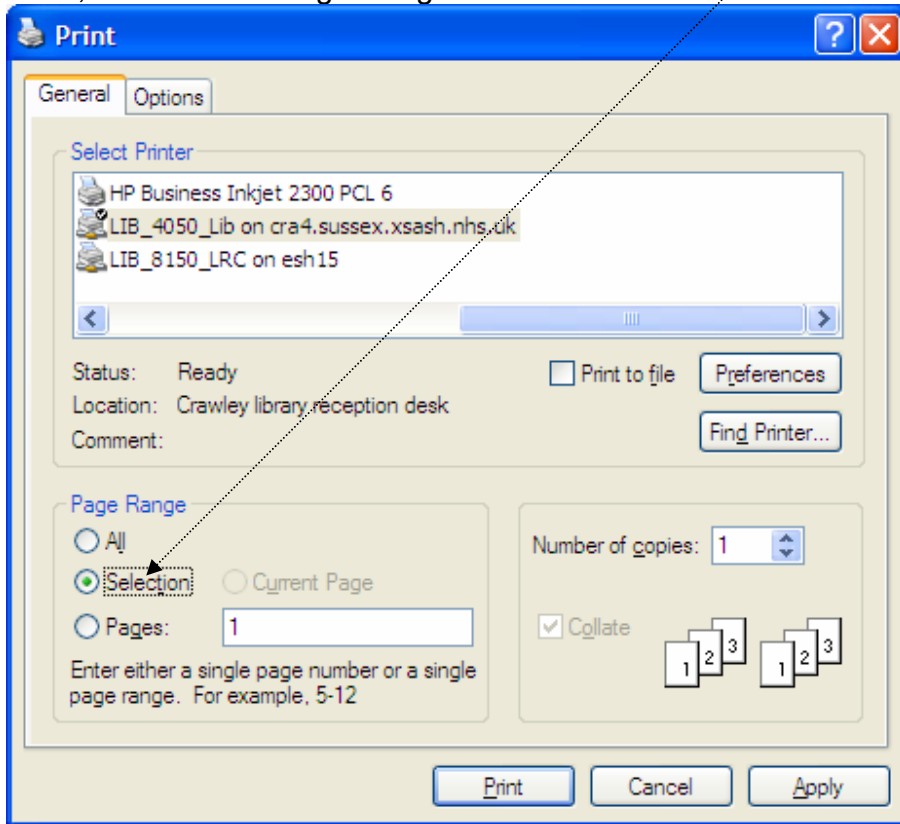
Cochrane Systematic reviews may be opened as a pdf file and then printed. Click on **PDF** at the top of the index on the left hand side of the screen.

[Review]

Continuous passive motion following total knee arthroplasty

[PDF](#) (Size 343K)

NOTE: some systematic reviews are very long! You may only wish to print selected pages. To do this **highlight** the section you wish to print, go to **File**, **Print**, and from the Page Range section select **Selection**. Click on **Print**.



Limits

There are some options for limiting your searches. Click **Advanced Search**. Using the drop down arrows refine your search by Author, Record Title, and Source.

The **Date Range** limit is further down the screen.

AND	antibiotics for severe asthma	Record Title
AND	lasserson	Author
AND		Abstract
AND		Keywords

Date Range

1800 - 2006 (4-digit years, or '*' for any year)