SEARCHING MEDLINE

Medline can be found under ‘Databases by title’, on health-related subject guides or via a Library catalogue search.

Part 1: Searching terms

Medline utilises MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) as the default search option. MeSH is a controlled vocabulary that can assist with finding results that may otherwise be missed due to differences in terminology or spelling, variations on words, etc., and can improve relevance in search results. Medline has a built-in thesaurus to match the keyword to the best-fit MeSH.

To map to subject headings type each keyword or phrase into the search box, making sure that the Map Term to Subject Heading box is ticked:

[ Note: For general keyword searching the Map Search Term to Subject Heading box will need to be un-ticked. ]

At the next screen, select the appropriate MeSH to use. In this example, diabetes maps to a number of headings:

Select as many MeSH as are appropriate to the search. It is recommended to click on the Scope icon for each heading (circled in red above) as this explains what each term is used for in Medline – some terms may not be used in the same way as ‘natural’ language. Scope notes can also assist with locating related headings.

The final search option listed is diabetes.mp – a keyword search (boxed in red above). This can be useful if the MeSH provided doesn’t exactly match the keywords being searched. Including this keyword search option can also assist with harvesting any newer articles that may not have been fully indexed by Medline at the time of the search.

What does ‘Focus’ mean?

Focus allows the user to limit only to articles where the selected MeSH has been identified as a main focus of the article. While this may be helpful for relevance, be aware that Focus may remove articles that include useful research, but have not been identified as having the search term at a high enough level of relevance in the article.
What does ‘Explode’ mean?

Explode will also include MeSH that are ranked lower on the heading hierarchy than the currently selected term (i.e. the more focussed MeSH within the broader headings).

For example, clicking on the blue heading link for Diabetes Mellitus from the results screen shown on the previous page, lists 8 more specialised headings within the Diabetes Mellitus heading (shown right). This includes the ‘Type 1’ and ‘Type 2’ headings already included in the results listing above.

In this case using Explode could be worthwhile, as the more specialised headings could also be included in the search – thus capturing as many articles on the subject as possible.

Not all MeSH have more specialised headings for Explode to use. The [+ ] symbols (shown next to ‘Type 1’ and ‘Type 2’ in the image here) assist is highlighting which MeSH have more specialised options within.

In the search below the MeSH for Diabetes Mellitus is being both Exploded and Focused:

At the next screen, subheadings are offered for further narrowing of results – these will include options such as Diagnosis, Epidemiology, Rehabilitation, etc., and will vary depending on the topic searched. If unsure which subheading to choose, there is an option to Include all Subheadings (highlighted in red):

Doing this for the current search provides the following results:

Shown above, the Explode search is identified by the exp directly before the MeSH. The Focus search is identified by the asterisk (*) before the MeSH.
Repeat the steps on Pages 1-2 for all individual terms needed for inclusion in the search.

A completed example is shown below:

The search at #5 shows where the MeSH has been combined with a keyword search. In this case the potential MeSH may not sufficiently capture the focus required so the original keywords have been added for improved relevance.

**Search Tip:**

Medline automatically contracts the Search History to save screen space. Use the Expand option (on the right of the search listings) to display all completed searches.

### Part 2: Connecting searches

**Connection method 1: Using ‘OR’ to connect similar terms**

In the example so far, 5 searches have been completed for the key terms. Searches 2-4 are similar topics that can be joined together to simplify the pool of results. To do this, tick the boxes next to the appropriate search numbers and then click the OR button underneath:

This will combine the 3 individual searches into one ‘super’ search:

Note that the combination is smaller than the three individual searches as duplicates have been removed.
Connection method 2: Using ‘AND’ to connect distinct terms (and combined searches)

AND is used to connect distinct/differing terms, along with any combined searches that have been completed. Tick the boxes next to the appropriate search numbers and then click the AND button underneath. In this case two distinct searches (#1 and #5) and the combined search using OR from above (#6) are being linked:

This will combine the selected searches into one ‘mega’ search that considers everything in the previous searches used to create it:

Part 3: Limiting search results

Once the required terms have been searched and combined appropriately, the results of the final combined search can then be limited according to inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Tick the relevant search number (in this case, #7), then click on the Additional Limits button above ‘Search History’:

This will open the Limits menu to allow filtering of results by Age Groups, Gender, Language, Publication Type, Publication Year, and more (shown over page).

Note: Where possible, avoid using the Edit Limits button as this applies some predetermined limits to the search that may not be suitable for all searches.
Select the limits as appropriate and click on the Limit A Search button (top or bottom of screen) to apply them.

The resulting resources can then be assessed for inclusion or exclusion.

The Additional Limits button can be used in the same way to adjust / remove any limits that may have been incorrectly applied.

Part 4: Saving search history and results

Medline offers a number of ways to save (or export) searches – both the search strategy and the results. Some options rely on the user creating an individual account with the database (detailed below).

Creating an individual account with Ovid (Medline)

Click on the My Account link at the top of the page:

At the next screen, click on the Create Account link (on the right). Fill out the required fields in the form and click Create to submit. An individual account with the database platform will then be created. In addition to Medline, this account can also be used with other Ovid databases, including EMBASE and PsycINFO.
Saving the Search History

Saving the Search History allows easy and repeated access to searches, including terms, combinations and limits applied.

Once saved, Medline allows searches to be re-run or edited at a later date.

**Tick the individual searches** to be saved (or use the ‘all’ option at the top) and click the **Save** button (shown right).

An alternate option is to click the **Save All** button located under the Search History box.

Log into an individual account when prompted.

**Before the search can be saved**, a title for the saved search will need to be entered into the **Search Name** box. Notes can be added to the **Comment** box if required. Click **Save** to finalise.

Saved searches will then be available to access from the ‘My Workspace’ area of the database under the ‘My Searches & Alerts’ menu.

Saving, exporting, emailing or printing search results

Medline offers a number of ways to keep the citation information for the results of searches.

Tick the records to be kept and access the options as required:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder Menu Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for article information to be formatted for printing (does not include the PDF of the article).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends selected results in the text of an email or as a file attachment (does not include the PDFs of any articles).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Export</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends the referencing information to citation management software such as Zotero, Mendeley or EndNote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>+ My Projects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows creation of project folders, saving selected resources within the <strong>My Workspace</strong> area under the <strong>My Projects</strong> menu.</td>
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**Need further assistance?**