

Searching the Cochrane Library

Overview

This guide provides an overview of the Cochrane Library and discusses when best to use this resource. It outlines the content of the individual databases included in the site, and offers guidance on how to effectively search for the information you need.

The guide also demonstrates how to access, manage, and reference your search results.

In this guide

The Databases.....	2
What is the Cochrane Library?.....	2
When to use the Cochrane Library	3
1. Accessing the Cochrane Library	3
2. Registering with the Cochrane Library	4
3. The Homepage	5
4. Browsing the Cochrane Library.....	6
5. Searching the Cochrane Library (Basic Search)	8
6. Viewing and navigating your results.....	9
7. Exporting your results	9
8. Advanced search options.....	10
9. Searching the Cochrane Library (Advanced search)	11
9. Combining search terms and further advanced search tips	12
10. Using search manager	13
11. Using Medical terms (MeSH) search	14
12. Locating a review in the Cochrane Library identified from a search elsewhere.....	15
13. Referencing from the Cochrane Library	16
Further help and support.....	16

The Databases

The Cochrane Library consists of several databases, each separately accessible from search results.

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)

A systematic review identifies an intervention for a specific disease or other problem in health care, and determines whether or not this intervention works. To do this authors locate, appraise and summarise evidence from as many relevant scientific studies as possible. They summarise conclusions about effectiveness, and provide a unique collation of the known evidence on a given topic.

Systematic reviews differ from other types of review in that they adhere to a strict design in order to make them more comprehensive, thus minimising the chance of bias, and ensuring their reliability. Rather than reflecting the views of the authors, or being based on a partial selection of the literature, (as is the case with many articles and reviews that are not explicitly systematic), they contain all known references to randomized and other controlled trials and other types of evidence on a particular intervention and a comprehensive summary of the available evidence. The reviews are therefore also valuable sources of information for those receiving care, as well as for doctors, decision makers and researchers.

Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)

CENTRAL includes details of published articles taken from bibliographic databases (notably Medline and Embase), and other published and unpublished sources. CENTRAL records include the title of the article, information on where it was published (bibliographic details) and, in many cases, a summary of the article. They do not contain the full text of the article.

Cochrane Clinical Answers

Cochrane Clinical Answers (CCAs) are designed to provide digestible, clinically-focussed information on a topic. Each CCA addresses a specific clinical question, and aims to provide the relevant evidence to healthcare professionals, assisting in decision making at the point-of-care.

Epistemonikos

Epistemonikos is a health evidence database that provides another useful source for systematic reviews and the linked primary studies. Accessible when using the Basic Search or browsing by topic, results from Epistemonikos appear under the **Other Reviews** tab of search results.

What is the Cochrane Library?

The Cochrane Library is a database of **systematic reviews** and other good quality evidence based healthcare information. A **review** is an attempt to synthesise the results and conclusions of two or more publications on a subject. A **systematic review** is a review which aims at a comprehensive overview of all the literature on a subject. It will pull together the results and conclusions of any studies in the field that satisfy certain standards of scientific rigour and technique.

The Cochrane Library is described as the best single source of reliable information on the effects of interventions in health care. It is designed to provide information and evidence to support decisions taken in health care and to inform those receiving care.

When to use the Cochrane Library

The whole of the Cochrane Library is concerned with the effectiveness of interventions for a given health care problem or in a particular health care situation.

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 aspirin in vascular dementia?
- **Is treatment A better than treatment B?**
Is there any evidence that clozapine is more effective in the treatment of schizophrenia than standard anti-psychotics?
- **What is an effective intervention to achieve outcome Z?**
What are the most effective strategies for stopping smoking?

The Cochrane Library **is not useful** for these types of questions:

- **General health care information**
Are there any new drugs for manic depression?
- **Statistical information**
What is the teenage pregnancy rate?
- **Cause, prognosis, epidemiology or risk factors for an illness**
What are the health effects of unemployment?
- **Guidelines**
- **Current research** (apart from systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials)

1. Accessing the Cochrane Library

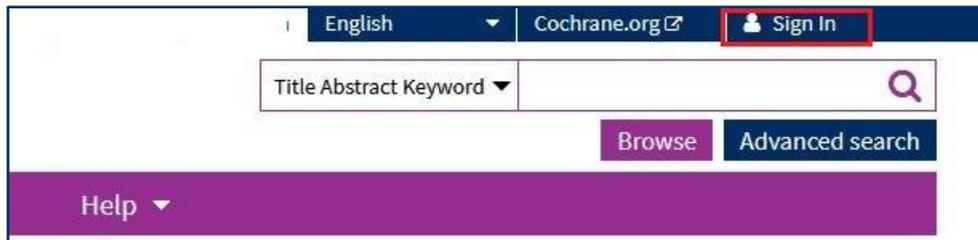
The **Cochrane Library** is freely available on the web, and can be accessed at <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/>



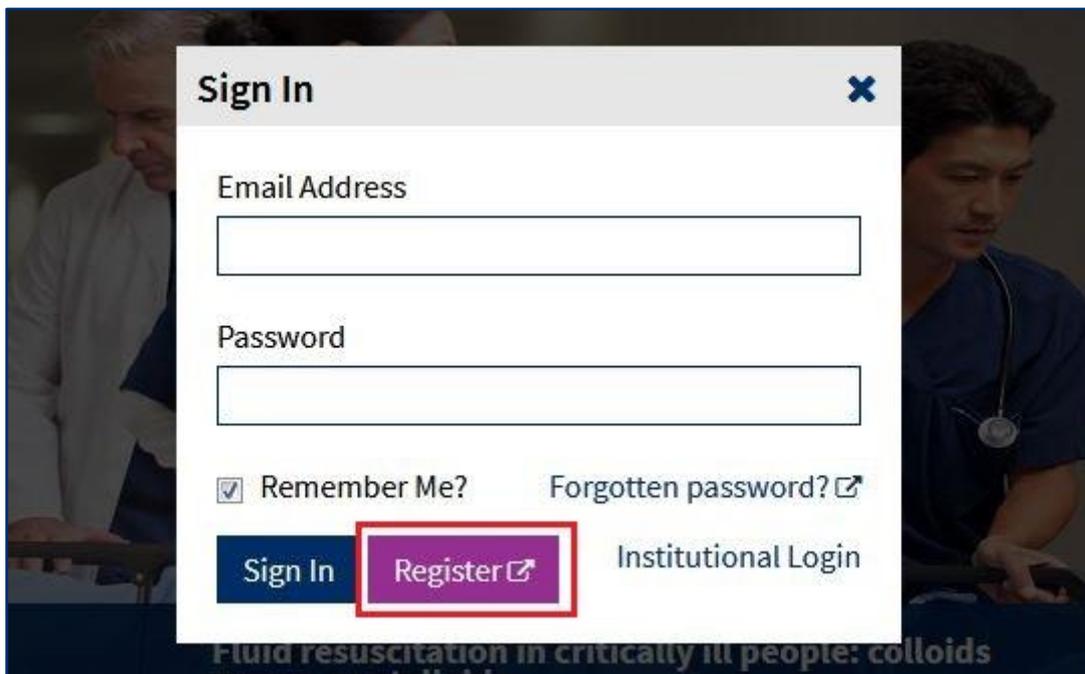
Alternatively look for the link to the Cochrane Library on **SGUL Library's A-Z list of databases** <https://libguides.sgul.ac.uk/az.php>

2. Registering with the Cochrane Library

If you want to be able to save your searches for future reference you will need to **register** with the Cochrane Library.



Click to Sign In, and on the following pop up screen, click Register: A new window will open with a new user registration form.



3. The Homepage

From the Cochrane Library homepage enter keywords to perform a **search** (See page 8 for more details), or click on **Browse** to view Cochrane Reviews by Topic (See page 6 for more details).



The **About** tab includes links to more information about the Cochrane Library and about Cochrane Reviews.

The **Help** tab provides more information on how to search and provides contact details in case you encounter any problems.



In the middle section of the homepage there are links to **Highlighted Reviews**, **Editorials** and **Special Collections**.



Highlighted Reviews | Editorials | Special Collections

Methods for blood loss estimation after vaginal birth
Virginia Diaz, Edgardo Abalos, Guillermo Carroli
13 September 2018

Interventions for preventing falls in older people in care facilities and hospitals
Ian D Cameron, Suzanne M Dyer, Claire E Panagoda, Geoffrey R Murray, Keith D Hill, Robert G Cumming, Ngaire Kerse
7 September 2018

Impact of public release of performance data on the behaviour of healthcare consumers and providers
David Metcalfe, Arturo J Rios Diaz, Olubode A Olufajo, M. Sofia Massa, Nicole ABM Ketelaar, Signe A. Flottorp, Daniel C Perry
6 September 2018

Cochrane Interactive Learning
Learn how to conduct Cochrane Reviews with Cochrane Interactive Learning

4. Browsing the Cochrane Library

There are several ways of finding relevant material in the Cochrane Library. In order to demonstrate how to browse or search the Cochrane Library we will use the following search scenario as our example:

Search Scenario

Ear infection is common in **children**, but can occur at any age. The main symptoms are earache and feeling unwell. Painkillers are the main treatment. Antibiotics are not usually needed but are prescribed in some cases. The infection, which is present in the **middle ear**, usually clears within a few days.

In this worksheet we are looking for information on the effectiveness of **antibiotics** for **children** with **ear infections** (also known as **otitis media** or **acute otitis media**).

Does the research evidence base suggest that children who are prescribed antibiotics for otitis media benefit from this treatment?

Within the Cochrane Library, the **Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews** can be browsed by **Topic**. This is the simplest way to look for relevant items, produced by different review groups.

In the top right of the homepage click on the link to **Browse**. This will open a list of topics.

Browse by Topic

Browse the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*

a	g	n
Allergy & intolerance	Gastroenterology & hepatology	Neonatal care
b	Genetic disorders	Neurology
Blood disorders	Gynaecology	o
c	h	Orthopaedics & trauma
Cancer	Health & safety at work	p
Child health	Health professional education	Pain & anaesthesia
Complementary & alternative medicine	Heart & circulation	Pregnancy & childbirth
Consumer & communication strategies	i	Public health
d	Infectious disease	r
Dentistry & oral health	k	Rheumatology
Developmental, psychosocial & learning problems	Kidney disease	s
Diagnosis	l	Skin disorders
e	Lungs & airways	t
Ear, nose & throat	m	Tobacco, drugs & alcohol
Effective practice & health systems	Mental health	u
Endocrine & metabolic	Methodology	Urology
Eyes & vision		w
		Wounds

...or [Browse by Cochrane Review Group](#)

Select **Ear, nose & throat** to view a list of results, and then use the **Topics** filters on the left of the page to refine your results as necessary. In this case, selecting **Ear** will provide more relevant results.

Topics i

- Ear, nose & throat x
- + Ear 69**
- + Nose & sinus 55
- + Cancer 20
- + Pharynx 19
- + Larynx 15
- + Salivary gland 1

[Show 16 more](#) ▼

This will provide a further subset of narrower topics, from which you should choose the topic which most closely matches your enquiry. In this case, we are interested in **Acute otitis media**.

Topics i

- Ear, nose & throat x
- Ear x
- + Acute otitis media 13**
- + Chronic otitis media 12
- + Hearing loss 12
- + Tinnitus 10
- + Meniere's disease 6

[Show 16 more](#) ▼

Clicking the link will let you see all reviews that have been carried out on this topic. If necessary, further limits such as publication date can be applied to the results. Clicking the title of a review will open the full-text in another window.

Publication date i

The last 3 months 0

The last 6 months 2

The last 9 months 3

The last year 4

The last 2 years 5

Custom Range:

dd/mm/yyyy to dd/mm/yyyy

[Apply](#) [Clear](#)

Status i

New search 6

Conclusions changed 1

Language i

Français 9

[Show 10 more](#) ▼

Type i

Intervention 13

Topics i

- Ear, nose & throat x
- Ear x
- Acute otitis media x

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews
Issue 9 of 12, September 2018

Select all (13) [Export selected citation\(s\)](#) [Show all previews](#)

Order by Relevancy Results per page 25 ▼

- 1 **Once or twice daily versus three times daily amoxicillin with or without clavulanate for the treatment of acute otitis media**
Sanguansak Thanaviratnanich, Malinee Laopalboon, Patravoot Vatanasapt
[Show Preview](#) ▼ Intervention Review 13 December 2013 Free access
- 2 **Short-course antibiotics for acute otitis media**
Anita L Kozyrskij, Terry P Klassen, Michael Moffatt, Krystal Harvey
[Show Preview](#) ▼ Intervention Review 8 September 2010
- 3 **Zinc supplements for preventing otitis media**
Anjana Gulani, Harshpal S Sachdev
[Show Preview](#) ▼ Intervention Review 29 June 2014 New search Free access
- 4 **Influenza vaccines for preventing acute otitis media in infants and children**
Mohd N Norhayati, Jacqueline J Ho, Mohd Y Azman
[Show Preview](#) ▼ Intervention Review 17 October 2017 New search
- 5 **Antibiotics for acute otitis media in children**
Roderick P Venekamp, Sharon L Sanders, Paul P Glasziou, Chris B Del Mar, Maroeska M Rovers
[Show Preview](#) ▼ Intervention Review 23 June 2015 New search Free access
- 6 **Grommets (ventilation tubes) for recurrent acute otitis media in children**
Loretta Lau, Paul Mick, Desmond A Nunez

5. Searching the Cochrane Library (Basic Search)

On the right hand side of the homepage you will see a search box which can be used to carry out a basic search of the whole Cochrane Library. Type your chosen terms into the box and select the magnifying glass button. (This is a keyword or “free-text” search)

For our example you might try **antibiotic* and “otitis media” and child*** (See page 12 for search tips)



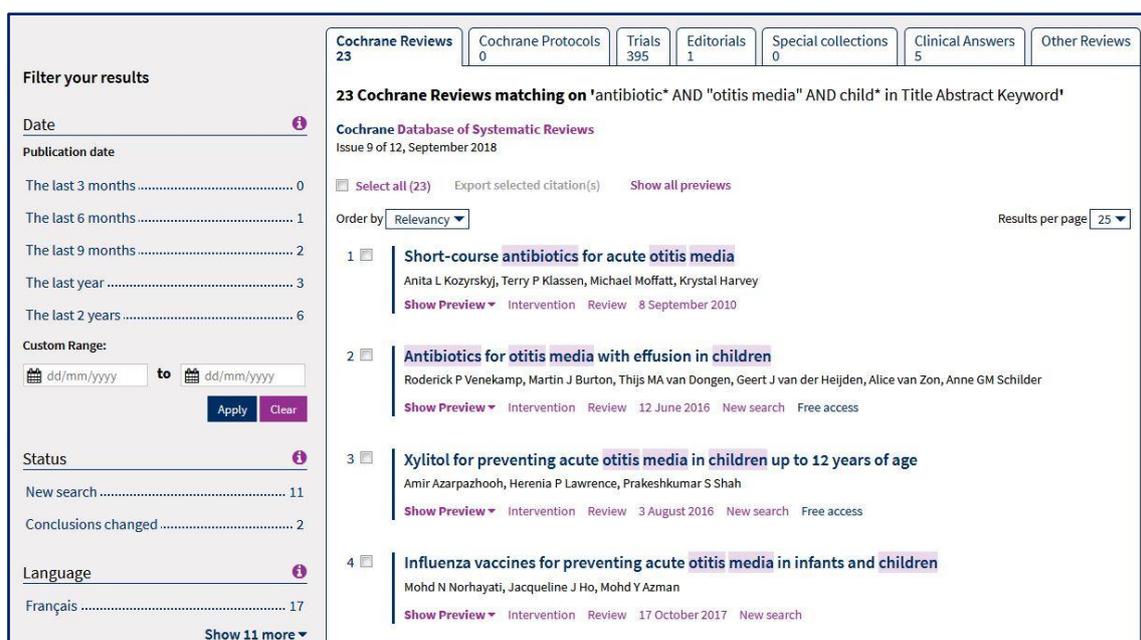
Title Abstract Keyword ▼ ID "otitis media" AND child* 🔍

Browse Advanced search

The **search results** page displays relevant Cochrane Reviews as default, and provides a separate tab for viewing results from the other databases such as CENTRAL (Trials) or CCAs.

The **number of records** found in each database is displayed in brackets. (For example there are 23 Cochrane Reviews on our topic)

Other reviews is where you will find systematic reviews from **Epistemonikos**.



Filter your results

Date i

Publication date

The last 3 months 0

The last 6 months 1

The last 9 months 2

The last year 3

The last 2 years 6

Custom Range:

dd/mm/yyyy to dd/mm/yyyy

Apply Clear

Status i

New search 11

Conclusions changed 2

Language i

Français 17

Show 11 more ▼

Cochrane Reviews 23

Cochrane Protocols 0

Trials 395

Editorials 1

Special collections 0

Clinical Answers 5

Other Reviews

23 Cochrane Reviews matching on 'antibiotic* AND "otitis media" AND child*' in Title Abstract Keyword'

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

Issue 9 of 12, September 2018

Select all (23) Export selected citation(s) Show all previews

Order by Relevancy Results per page 25

- Short-course antibiotics for acute otitis media
Anita L. Kozyrskyj, Terry P. Klassen, Michael Moffatt, Krystal Harvey
Show Preview Intervention Review 8 September 2010
- Antibiotics for otitis media with effusion in children
Roderick P. Venekamp, Martin J. Burton, Thijs MA van Dongen, Geert J van der Heijden, Alice van Zon, Anne GM Schilder
Show Preview Intervention Review 12 June 2016 New search Free access
- Xylitol for preventing acute otitis media in children up to 12 years of age
Amir Azarpazhooh, Herenia P. Lawrence, Prakeshkumar S. Shah
Show Preview Intervention Review 3 August 2016 New search Free access
- Influenza vaccines for preventing acute otitis media in infants and children
Mohd N. Norhayati, Jacqueline J. Ho, Mohd Y. Azman
Show Preview Intervention Review 17 October 2017 New search

Search Tips

- Use this truncation symbol: * to search on the stem of a word, for example **antibiotic*** will find antibiotic or antibiotics
- Use double-quotes to search for phrases, for example **“otitis media”** will look for those two words only when they appear directly next to each other
- Use AND to narrow your search to results where all terms appear
- Use OR to broaden your search to include alternative terms, for example “ear infection*” or “otitis media”
- Use the drop down menu on the right to specify where you want to search, for example **Record title** will search for the terms in review titles only.

6. Viewing and navigating your results

When you find a review that you want to look at more closely, click on the title.

This will open a new page with further bibliographic details, to the right of which you will see links to different sections of the Review.

The default display is the **Abstract**, which outlines what the review is about. Below this is a **Plain Language Summary** which can be very useful for gaining a quick summary of a review and its findings.

The screenshot shows a Cochrane review page. At the top, the title is "Once or twice daily versus three times daily amoxicillin with or without clavulanate for the treatment of acute otitis media". Below the title, it says "Cochrane Systematic Review - Intervention | Version published: 13 December 2013 | see what's new". There are icons for "Am" and "score" with the value "38" and a link for "View article information". The authors listed are "Sanguansak Thanaviratananich | Malinee Laopaiboon | Patravoot Vatanasapt" with a link for "View authors' declarations of interest". The "Abstract" section is highlighted in purple, and it is noted as "available in English | Español | Français". The "Background" section starts with "Acute otitis media (AOM) is a common problem in children, for which amoxicillin, with or without clavulanate, is frequently prescribed as a treatment of choice. The conventional recommendation is either three or four daily doses. However, nowadays it is frequently prescribed as once or twice daily doses. If once or twice daily amoxicillin, with or without clavulanate, is as effective for acute otitis media as three or four times a day, it may be more convenient to give the medication once or twice a day to children and hence improve compliance." The "Objectives" section states "To compare the effectiveness of one or two daily doses with three or four daily doses of amoxicillin, with or without clavulanate, for the treatment of AOM in children; and to compare complication rates and adverse reactions." On the right side, there is a navigation menu with options: "View PDF", "Cite this Review", "Request Permissions", "Comment on Review", "Read comments on this Review(1)", "Print", "Share", "Email", "Abstract", "Plain language summary", "Authors' conclusions", "Background", "Objectives", "Methods", "Results", "Discussion", "Appendices", "Information", "Authors", "History", "Keywords", and "Translation notes".

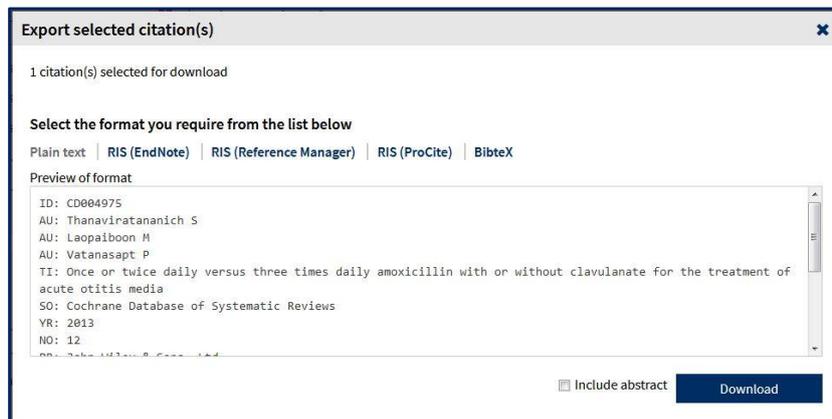
Reviews are large documents so it is best to use the links to view specific parts of the review. If you do wish to **print** out the full review there is an option for this above the navigation links.

7. Exporting your results

To export your results as a file that you can save on your PC, tick the box to the left of the reference(s) of interest or click on **Select All** to select all results found, and click on **Export selected citations**.

The screenshot shows a search results page with the heading "23 Cochrane Reviews matching on 'antibiotic* AND 'otitis media' AND child* in Title Abstract Keyword'". Below this, it says "Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews" and "Issue 10 of 12, October 2018". At the bottom, there are three buttons: "Select all (23)", "Export selected citation(s)", and "Show all previews". The "Export selected citation(s)" button is highlighted with a red box.

From the resulting dialogue window that opens, select the preferred format for your citations and click **Download**.



You can also download citations for individual reviews whilst viewing them, by using the **Cite this Review** link.



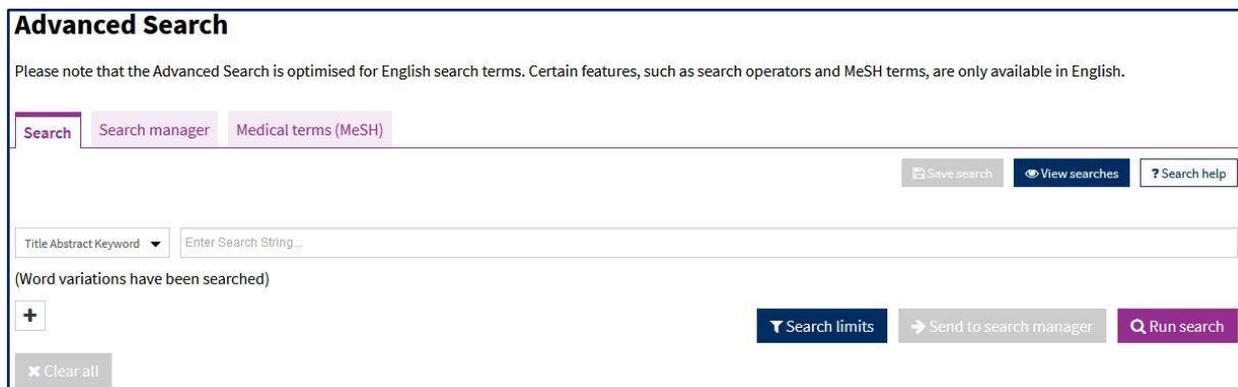
8. Advanced search options

The Cochrane Library is a relatively small database and a basic search will probably suffice in most cases. Should you wish to explore the more advanced search options, however, the following pages give an introduction on how to use them.

The **Advanced Search** option is located underneath the basic search box on the Cochrane Library Homepage. Click on this to see advanced search options.



The following page will appear, with three tabs to choose from.

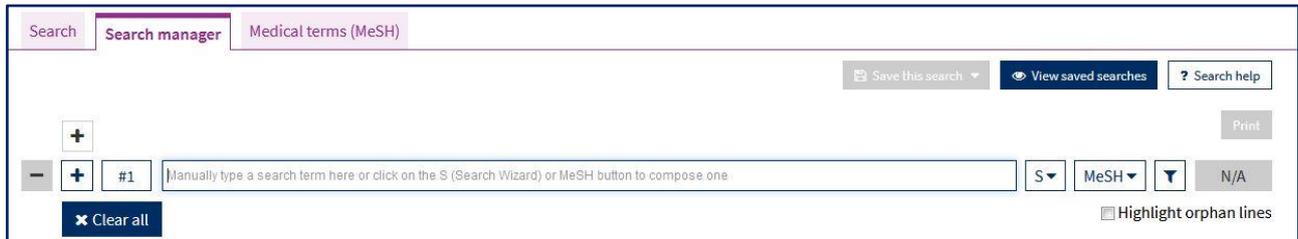


Search

This default tab can be used to build a search by combining search terms using **AND** or **OR**. (See page 12 for explanation of combining terms)

Search Manager

Use this for complex searches. It also enables you to include MeSH terms in your strategy and to save your search.



Medical Terms (MeSH)

The Cochrane Library utilises a thesaurus, developed by the National Library of Medicine, called MeSH (Medical Subject Headings). The thesaurus is a set of terms used to describe medical concepts, and its hierarchical nature helps to define the relationship between the terms. Indexing articles in this way allows you to perform a more targeted search.



9. Searching the Cochrane Library (Advanced search)

The default option in **Advanced search** is the **Search** Tab. This allows you to carry out more complex searches than the basic search option.

Under the **Search** tab, type “**otitis media**” **OR** “**ear infection**” into the search box. This will search for either of these terms within the **Title and Abstract** and look for them as keywords.

Click on the **+** icon underneath the left hand side of the search box to include another term in your search.

Select **AND** or **OR** to combine your first and second line of searches

In our example we type **antibiotic*** into the second search box and combine with **AND** as we are interested in records that talk about otitis media **AND** antibiotics.

Use the second drop down menu to specify what part of the record you want the database to search. It is usually most helpful to search within **Title Abstract Keyword**.

We can add a third line to specify we are interested in only articles that deal with infection in children, using **child***. Our complete search would look like the example below:

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH)

Save search View searches Search help

"otitis media" or "ear infection"
 antibiotic*
 child*

(Word variations have been searched)

Click on **Search limits** to see options for limiting your search.

Search limits

Cochrane Reviews
 Cochrane Protocols
 Trials
 Clinical Answers
 Editorials
 Special collections

All dates
 The last month
 The last 3 months
 The last 6 months
 The last 9 months
 The last year
 The last 2 years
 Between Jan YYYY and Jan YYYY

Search word variations
 (e.g. "paid" will find pay, pays, paying, payed)

CENTRAL Trials only
 Original publication year
 All years
 Between YYYY and YYYY

Cochrane Group
 Choose Cochrane Group

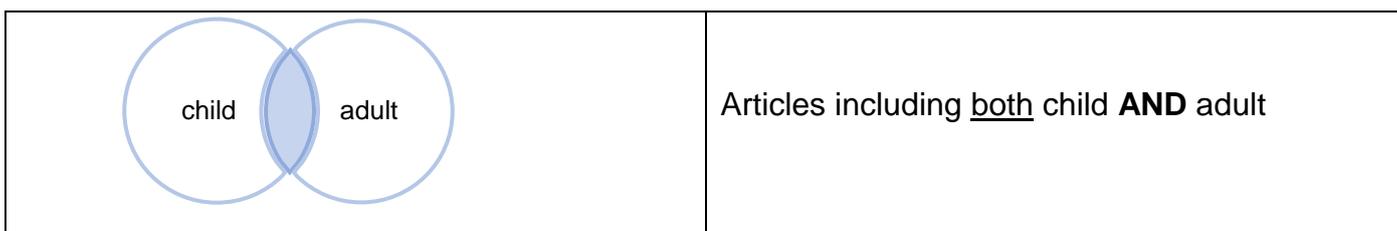
You can limit by:

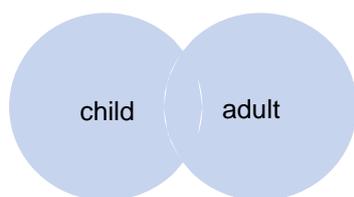
- **publication date**, for example, articles published between 2008 and 2018
- **content type** for example, Cochrane Reviews only

9. Combining search terms and further advanced search tips

Combining search terms

AND / OR are used by databases and search engines to combine your search terms. The diagrams below explain how and when to use **AND / OR**





Articles including either child **OR** adult

Further Search tips

- Some alternative spellings are automatically searched (for example, tumor/tumour), but to be certain of catching them, use internal truncation, for example, **isch*mic** to find ischaemic or ischemic.
- Use brackets to control the order in which the search executes, if you are using a combination of AND and OR, for example, **magnesium AND (eclampsia OR perinatal asphyxia)**
- NEAR can be used instead of AND to narrow your search. For example **smoking NEAR pregnancy** will find the two words within 6 words of each other in either order, so is more specific than using AND. NEAR/n will find the words within n words of each other in either order, for example, NEAR/4.

10. Using search manager

Using the **Search Manager** allows you to more easily build and save complex search strategies.

Enter your first search term and then click **Continue**. On the right hand side, you will see the number of results that match your criteria, and an additional line will automatically be added for you to type your next search term.

The screenshot shows the 'Search manager' tab in a web interface. It displays a list of search terms with their respective result counts:

Term	Results
#1 "otitis media" or "ear infection"	2566
#2 antibiotic*	25126
#3 child*	134646
#4 #1 and #2 and #3	

Buttons for 'Save this search', 'View saved searches', 'Search help', 'Print', 'Cancel', and 'Continue' are visible.

Combine results by typing the number of the search with an operator (e.g., AND or OR). If we want results including all of the terms in the above search, we would type #1 AND #2 AND #3

To view the results for a search, click on the number to the right of the search line.

Below your search you will see the option to **Save this search**. Give your search a name, make any comments you want and click **Save this search** (You must have registered and be logged in to the Cochrane Library to do this. See page 4).

This screenshot is similar to the previous one but includes the 'Save this search' button at the top right. Below the search list, there is a 'Clear all' button and a 'Highlight orphan lines' checkbox. The result count for the combined search (#4) is now 565.

Once you have saved a search, you will be able to access it by clicking on **View saved searches**.

11. Using Medical terms (MeSH) search

What are Medical Subject Headings (MeSH terms)?

MeSH terms are assigned to Cochrane reviews within the Cochrane Library. These are controlled index terms and can be very effective in searching for very precise and targeted results. (They are also used in other databases such as Medline and Pubmed)

The MeSH search allows searching using the MeSH terms and the tree structures. When you search with a MeSH term the database will bring back all articles that have been indexed as being about that term.

The MeSH Thesaurus is organized hierarchically in “**trees**”, with the lower levels of the trees containing more specific terms.

MeSH Trees

MeSH term - **Otitis**

Explode all trees
 Single MeSH term (unexploded)
 Explode selected trees

Tree number 1

- Otorhinolaryngologic Diseases [+6]**
 - Ear Diseases [+15]**
 - Cholesteatoma, Middle Ear**
 - Congenital Microtia**
 - Ear Deformities, Acquired**
 - Ear Neoplasms**
 - Earache**
 - Hearing Disorders [+3]**
 - Herpes Zoster Oticus**
 - Labyrinth Diseases [+4]**
 - Myringosclerosis**
 - Otitis [+3]**

To search using MeSH, once in **Advanced search**, click on the **Medical Terms (MeSH)** tab.

Type your search term into the box. If you click your cursor into the **Select subheadings / qualifiers** box, you will be provided with common search filters.

Search Search manager **Medical terms (MeSH)**

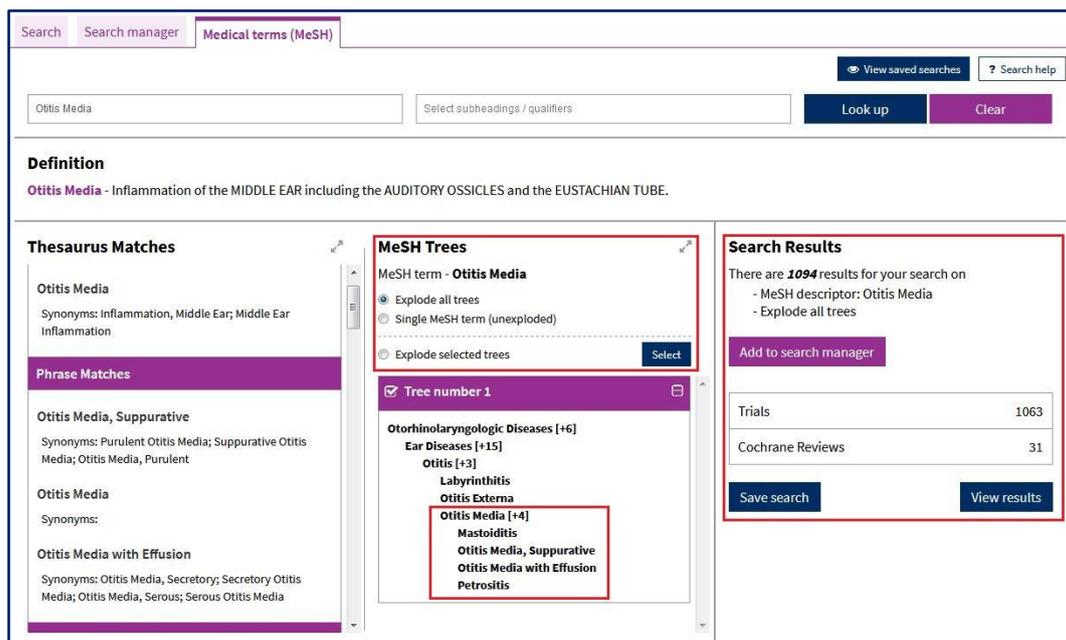
- abnormalities - AB
- administration & dosage - AD
- adverse effects - AE
- agonists - AG
- analogs & derivatives - AA
- analysis - AN
- anatomy & histology - AH
- antagonists & inhibitors - AI

You can filter your search term using these **MeSH qualifiers** if you wish. However, to keep your search as broad as possible simply click **Look up**.

This will display lots of information on your chosen MeSH term. You may wish to click on a link to search with a broader or narrower term as appropriate.

Use the **MeSH trees** section to “explode” (widen) or narrow your search: In our example **Explode all trees** will expand the search to look for articles indexed under Otitis media **or** any of the 4 narrower terms underneath.

Selecting **Single MeSH term (unexploded)** will search for articles under Otitis Media only and omit any indexed under the narrower terms.



On the right hand side of the page you can see your **Search results**, below which you can see in advance the number of results from each database.

To combine your MeSH term with other terms in your search click **Add to Search Manager**. (See page 13)

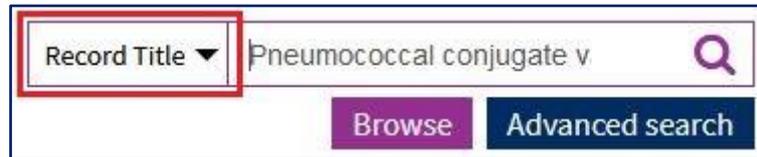
To view the results of your MeSH search click **View Results**, or you can save your search if you are logged in to the Cochrane Library. (see page 4)

12. Locating a review in the Cochrane Library identified from a search elsewhere

If when searching another database, such as Medline, you retrieve a reference to a systematic review originally published in the Cochrane Library, you can visit the Cochrane Library and retrieve the full review.

Fortanier AC, Venekamp RP, Boonacker CWB, Hak E, Schilder AGM, Sanders EAM, Damoiseaux RAMJ. **Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines for preventing otitis media.**

In the **Search** box, type in a few words from the title and change the drop down menu to search within the **Record Title**. To locate the above item, search for **Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines**.



13. Referencing from the Cochrane Library

From the main page of any systematic review, clicking on the **Cite this Review** link to the right of the title and author details will provide the necessary details to reference the review.



Further help and support

For further help or advice, contact a member of the NHS Liaison team on the details below.



NHS Library Contacts:

Karen John-Pierre
NHS and Liaison Manager
Tel: 020 8725 5433
kjohn@sgul.ac.uk

Stephen Reid
NHS Liaison Support Librarian /OpenAthens Administrator
Tel: 020 8725 5433
sreid@sgul.ac.uk

