How to search Medline (OVID)

The following guide takes you through the process of creating and running a search in the Medline (OVID) database. The Embase and PsycInfo databases use the same OVID interface, so the search process is the same but please be aware that these databases use a different indexing system, so when using the “Map Term to Subject Heading” feature, the keywords that are recommended may vary from those used in Medline.

Log in

From the Library Search box, enter Medline and click Submit:

Then click on the Database link:

You may be prompted to sign in with your University username and password. At the next screen, click on Continue:

You are now ready to start searching Medline.
Search Medline

Remember that you need to break your search into the different ideas/concepts that you are looking for and then think about any alternative search terms that different researchers may use to describe the same idea, for example, cancer or neoplasms, rubella or german measles.

The search in this guide is looking for randomised controlled trials on the effect of passive smoking on children diagnosed with asthma or bronchitis.

The first idea to search for is passive smoking. Type **passive smoking** into the search box:

Notice that the search mode is set to **Keyword** and that the “Map Term to Subject Heading” box is ticked.

Click on the **Search** button and Medline will check your keyword against its thesaurus, called MeSH (Medical Subject Headings). MeSH headings are index terms. When papers are added to Medline, the most relevant index terms are selected to describe the content of the research. This makes sure that you search for the most relevant keywords. Sometimes it finds a direct match, sometimes it will offer a suitable alternative and other times you will need to override the suggestions and continue with your chosen keyword.

In this search, the keyword passive smoking is mapped to the heading Tobacco Smoke Pollution:

To check that this is the correct keyword, click the **Information** button on the far right hand side of the screen. This will provide further information about the keyword.

The keyword in blue is the recognised MeSH heading. You can click on the heading to find broader and narrower search terms. By clicking the Explode box, your search will automatically search for your selected subject heading and any narrower keywords. This is recommended for
most searches. A MeSH search will only look for the selected keyword/s in the list of MeSH headings added to a paper.

Your original search term is at the bottom of the list in the format: **passive smoking.mp. search as keyword**. The .mp. means many or multiple places and Medline will search for your keyword in the title and abstracts of articles.

For most searches, a combination of MeSH and keyword searches is recommended.

**Tick the boxes** (as above) and click **Continue**. This will give you your first search results:

You now need to repeat the above process for the next idea of asthma.

Type **asthma** into the search box and click **Submit**:

You may decide to include **Asthma, Exercise Induced**:  

Click **Continue** to see the next stage of your search results:
Now search for bronchitis:

You may decide to include Bronchitis, Chronic

Click Continue to see the next stage of your search results.

You now have three stages to your search: passive smoking, asthma, bronchitis, which represent two ideas.

The searches for asthma and bronchitis represent the same broad idea but focus on different conditions. You are looking for research that discusses either condition. At this stage you need to OR these two keywords together, so that you find research discussing either or both conditions.

Click the boxes for asthma and bronchitis and then click the OR button:

This has combined the two conditions together and has added another stage to your search:
However, you still need to combine together the two ideas of passive smoking and asthma or bronchitis.

**Click the boxes for passive smoking and the combined asthma or bronchitis search** and then click the **AND** button:

- **This will combine your different ideas together:**

**Limit a search by publication type and age**

However, the search question was limited to a population of children and the study type of randomised controlled trials (RCTs).

In the OVID databases there are a range of pre-defined limits that you can apply to any search. In this case we can limit by Age Group and Publication Type. Scroll down the page to underneath the search box and click on **Additional Limits**:
Select **All Child** and **Randomised Controlled Trials** from the relevant boxes and then scroll up or down the page and click on the **Limit a Search** button:

You now have a much smaller number of results:

You could further limit your search to English only and to a specific year range.

You now need to review your search results. You may want to edit your search terms and add in more keywords and combinations.

**Limit a search using Clinical Queries**

Sometimes you may want to limit your search to a particular study methodology or type of evidence, such as therapy or diagnosis studies. In Medline, one of the categories under **Additional Limits** is Clinical Queries. The following options are available: reviews, therapy, diagnosis, prognosis, causation-etiology, economics, clinical prediction guides, qualitative and costs. Each category is further sub-divided into

- Maximizes sensitivity: retrieves all relevant papers
- Maximizes specificity: retrieves the most relevant papers
- Best balance of sensitivity and specificity
Run your search and then apply the relevant limit.

**Find full text articles**

You will also want to find the full text of some papers. Next to each reference you will see a WebBridge button. This will check to see if we have full text access or not. If we do not have access, it will direct you to the Library’s Article Reach service that allows you to request copies of the articles, free of charge.

Click on the **WebBridge** button to see if the full text is available:

The following article is available:

![Motivating parents of kids with asthma to quit smoking: the effect of the teachable moment and increasing intervention intensity using a longitudinal randomized trial design.](image)

However, this article is not available and you will need to make an Article Reach request:
Further help

If you need any further help or advice, please contact Samantha.A.Johnson@warwick.ac.uk or call 024 765 22427 (Ext. 22427).