

8 step guide to the Cochrane Library

1. Content

The Cochrane Library holds key information on the effects of interventions in health care. It is designed to provide information and evidence to support decisions taken in healthcare:

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (Other Reviews)

Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (Clinical Trials)

Cochrane Methodology Register (Methods Studies)

Health Technology Assessment Database (Technology Assessments)

NHS Economic Evaluation Database (Economic Evaluations)

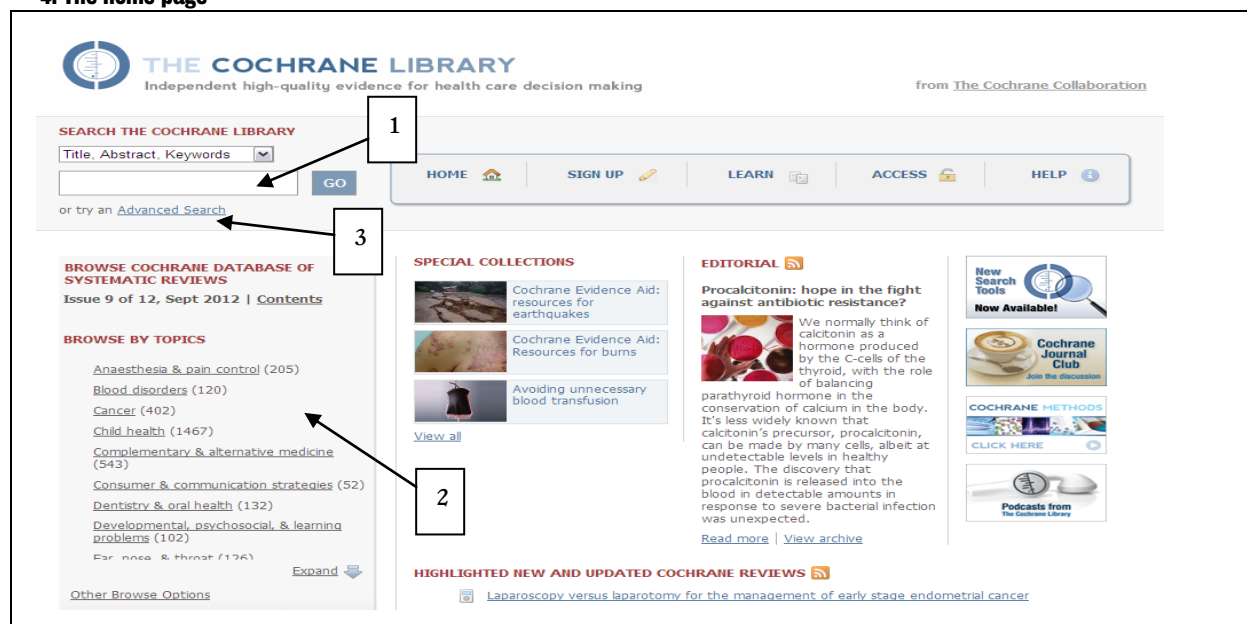
2. Planning your search

Break down your question into keywords. Consider using **PICO** (Patient, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) to do this.

3. Accessing the Cochrane Library

Go to www.thecochranelibrary.com

4. The home page



The screenshot shows the Cochrane Library homepage. Annotation 1 points to the search box labeled 'SEARCH THE COCHRANE LIBRARY' with a dropdown menu for 'Title, Abstract, Keywords' and a 'GO' button. Annotation 2 points to the 'BROWSE COCHRANE DATABASE OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS' section, specifically to the 'BROWSE BY TOPICS' list which includes categories like 'Anaesthesia & pain control (205)', 'Blood disorders (120)', 'Cancer (402)', etc. Annotation 3 points to the 'GO' button in the search bar.

1. **Search box** – use * to truncate, e.g. depress*, and speech marks to search for phrases, e.g. “heart attack”.

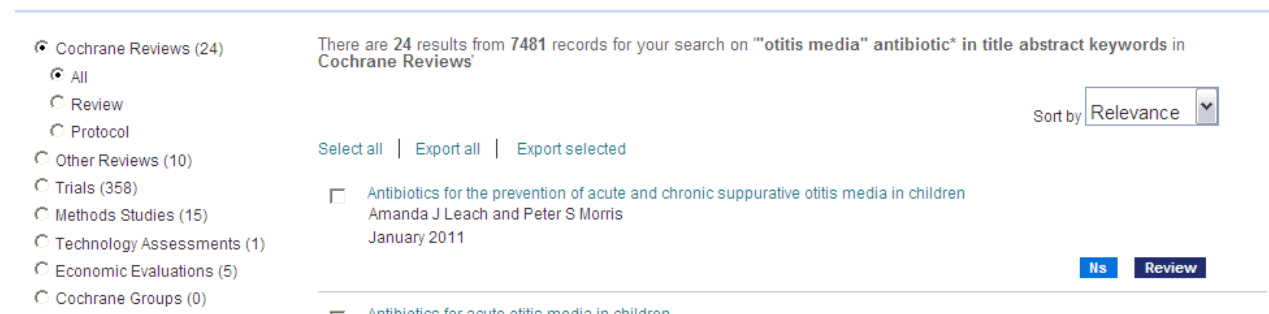
Clicking on Go searches across all the databases listed in step 1.

2. **Browsing** – browse Cochrane Systematic Reviews by topic, or click on **Other Browse options** below this.

3. **Advanced search** – click on this to access subject heading (MeSH) searching, search manager, limits and saved searches

5 Displaying, saving and exporting results

The search results page lists the number of records found from each database, as below. The first screen displays results for Cochrane Reviews. The results from other databases can be viewed by selecting the relevant link on the left:



The screenshot shows the search results page for the query "otitis media" antibiotic*. It displays 24 results from 7481 records. On the left, there is a list of databases with radio buttons: Cochrane Reviews (24), All, Review, Protocol, Other Reviews (10), Trials (358), Methods Studies (15), Technology Assessments (1), Economic Evaluations (5), and Cochrane Groups (0). The main area shows the first two results, both titled "Antibiotics for the prevention of acute and chronic suppurative otitis media in children" by Amanda J Leach and Peter S Morris, dated January 2011. There are buttons for 'Ns' and 'Review' next to each result. At the top right, there is a 'Sort by' dropdown menu set to 'Relevance' and links for 'Select all', 'Export all', and 'Export selected'.

Click on a title to view more details of a document. Cochrane Reviews and Methodology Reviews contain full text records. Other databases contain only citations (some with abstracts). Within a Cochrane Review you can click on Article and then the Jump to drop down menu (on the right) to access specific sections, e.g. Authors' conclusions, or Methods (for Search Strategies)

Exporting bibliographic citation records

- when viewing records in a database, click in the box to the left of the record to mark it (click again to unmark) or click on **Select All** to mark all records
- click on the **Export Selected Citations** or the **Export All Results** icon at the bottom of the screen
- select **Export type** (according to computer used) and **File Type** (Citation or Abstract and citation) and click on **Go**
- select **Save** to save to a selected drive

You can open the default file format (RIS formatted) in a word processing program or import to a bibliographic referencing software program, eg EndNote.

6. Subject heading (MeSH) searching

The Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) are used to index many of the records in the Cochrane Library. They can be helpful, because authors use different terms to describe the same thing: eg 'heart attack' or 'myocardial infarction'. Generally it is best to search using both a free-text search and a subject heading search. To conduct a MeSH search, click on the link to MeSH Search (If you are on the home page, you need to click on Advanced Search to see the MeSH option).

- enter your search term, e.g. antibiotics
- click on **Lookup** to display suggested headings to use.

The screenshot shows the MeSH Search interface. At the top, there are tabs for Search, Search Manager, Medical Terms (MeSH), and Browse. The 'Medical Terms (MeSH)' tab is active. A search box contains 'Anti-Bacterial Agents', and a 'Lookup' button is next to it. Below the search box, there is a 'Definition' section for 'Anti-Bacterial Agents' and a 'Thesaurus matches' section. The 'Thesaurus matches' section lists 'Exact Term Match' and 'Phrase Matches'. The 'Exact Term Match' section shows 'Anti-Bacterial Agents' with synonyms 'Antibiotics'. The 'Phrase Matches' section lists 'Antibiotics, Antineoplastic', 'Antibiotics, Cytotoxic, Cytotoxic Antibiotics', 'Antibiotics, Antitubercular', 'Antibiotic Prophylaxis', and 'Calcimycin'. The 'MeSH trees' section shows a tree structure for 'Anti-Bacterial Agents' with options to 'Explode all trees', 'Single MeSH term (unexploded)', and 'Explode selected trees'. A 'Select' button is next to the 'Explode all trees' option. On the right, a 'Search results' box shows 'There are 8110 results for your search on' and a list of results: 'MeSH descriptor: [Anti-Bacterial Agents]' and 'explode all trees'. Below this, a 'Save search' button and an 'Add to Search Manager' link are visible. A table shows the distribution of results across different Cochrane products: Cochrane Reviews (187), Other Reviews (497), Trials (6945), Methods Studies (0), Technology Assessments (69), Economic Evaluations (412), and Cochrane Groups (0). A 'View Results' button is at the bottom of the table.

click on an index term, e.g. Anti-Bacterial Agents, and then **Select**. Click on **view results** to display the results.

7. Search manager

If you wish to build up a search history, e.g. to combine MeSH and keyword searches, then click on **Add to Search manager** when conducting a search. (If you are on the home page, you need to click on Advanced Search to see this option). Click on **Search manager** and combine the sets of results, e.g. from your keyword searches and MeSH searches, using #1 OR #2 etc (for searches for similar concepts) and #1 AND #2 etc (for different concepts), as below:

The screenshot shows the Search Manager interface. It displays a list of search queries with their respective result counts. The queries are: #1 "otitis media":ti,ab,kw (Word variations have been searched) with 1707 results; #2 MeSH descriptor: [Otitis Media] explode all trees with 1008 results; #3 #1 or #2 with 1708 results; #4 MeSH descriptor: [Anti-Bacterial Agents] explode all trees with 8110 results; #5 antibiotic* with 15518 results; #6 #4 or #5 with 19683 results; and #7 #3 and #6 with 540 results. Each query has a minus button, a plus button, an 'Edit' button, and a 'View Results' button. The result counts are displayed in a box on the right of each query.

8. Further information and advice

Library Services offers regular and tailored training sessions in database searching. See: www.kcl.ac.uk/library/nhs or contact your Information Specialist for details.