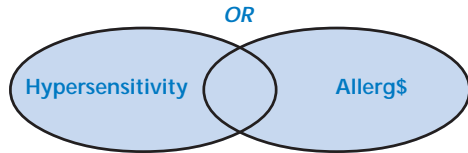


## 4. Combine Search Results

Once you have searched for each term and created separate sets, the next step is to combine them using the operators **AND** and **OR** :

Hypersensitivity (MeSH) OR allerg\$ (freetext)

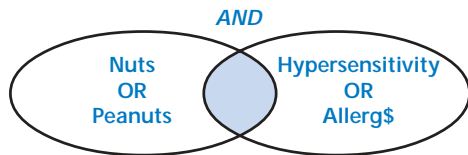
Will search for references with **either** hypersensitivity as a subject heading **or** for references containing the stem



'allerg-', **or** for references containing both :

Once sets have been created for each concept, they must then be combined using **AND** :

Here the set representing *Nuts* or its alternatives is combined with the set representing *hypersensitivity* or its alternatives, to create the intersection between the two i.e. Only references covering **both** concepts together.



## 5. Refine Search

If you have **too few** results you may need to broaden your search by :

- Using additional synonyms/alternatives
- Using broader subject headings in the thesaurus and/or explode subject headings
- Including all subheadings with thesaurus terms
- Combining thesaurus and free text terms

If you have **too many** results, consider narrowing the search by :

- Using subject terms only
- Using more specific terms
- Using the 'focus' or Major MESH option to find references where the subject heading is the main point of the article
- Using specific subheadings with MeSH terms

## 6. Limit Results

Limiting functions will allow you to restrict your results by various parameters such as :

### Age group

e.g. child or adult or more specific (infant or middle aged). Hence the search for *nut allergies in children* could be limited to all child age groups, without needing to search for the term children.

### Publication type

e.g. Reviews, meta-analyses, guidelines. It is also possible to limit specifically to review types *academic* and *tutorial*, which tend to be of a higher quality. Always check the Cochrane Library for the highest quality systematic reviews, as these are more extensive than in Medline.

### Language

use with caution as foreign language articles may be relevant and may provide an English abstract.

## 7. Further Assistance

For further information and advice on searching please contact the library, training sessions are also available.

AHP Integrated  
Directorate

Clinical  
Development  
Team

# Carrying Out A Literature Search

Salford Royal Hospitals   
NHS Trust

Salford   
Primary Care Trust

Medical Library  
0161 206 5405  
libmail@fs1.ho.man.ac.uk



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## 1. Clarify Your Topic

Take time to consider the exact information you are looking for. If possible try to rephrase your topic as a question. Break down the topic into its major concepts such as;

1. The patient or problem being addressed
2. The intervention or treatment being considered
3. Comparative treatments if relevant
4. Desired clinical outcomes of

e.g. Nut allergies in children

Patient	Exposure	Outcome
Children	Nuts	Allergy

Try to think of alternative words, spelling variations or synonyms for each concept :

**Children** : child, paediatric, pediatric

**Nuts** : nuts/peanuts

**Allergy** : hypersensitivity / allergy / intolerance

## 2. Select Database(s)

The following databases are available through Aditus [www.aditus.nhs.uk](http://www.aditus.nhs.uk), using a NHS Athens password. Registration is through the Aditus site.

### Healthcare Databases :

<b>Medline</b>	Largest biomedical database U.S orientation
<b>EMBASE</b>	Biomedical - Europe orientation
<b>AMED</b>	Allied Health and alternative medicine - UK orientation
<b>PsycINFO</b>	Psychology & psychiatry with related disciplines
<b>BNI</b>	Nursing - UK orientation
<b>CINAHL</b>	Nursing and Allied Health US Orientation

### Specialist Review Sources :

#### *The Cochrane Library & Clinical Evidence*

Both of these sources provide high quality summaries of clinical evidence available on a wide range of treatments. The Cochrane Library currently contains over 1,000 systematic reviews.

These are now available via the National Electronic Library for Health [www.nelh.nhs.uk](http://www.nelh.nhs.uk) and are freely available to everyone in England.

## 3. Conduct The Search

There are two main methods of searching, and although different databases have different features, the principles of searching will remain the same :

### *i) Subject Searching*

Databases such as Medline use a controlled vocabulary to index articles. Each article will have a number of subject terms (Medical Subject Headings - MeSH - in Medline) assigned to it to represent the key concepts that it covers. Searching using a subject term should only retrieve material relevant to that concept.

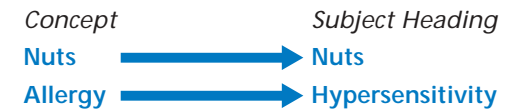
### Advantages :

- Should ensure retrieval of relevant material
- Standardizes terminology / spelling
- Allows a term to be searched with its more specific headings (exploding)

### *How do I know which subject heading to use ?*

When searching ensure that the thesaurus mapping box is ticked. The system will then search on your term and also take you to a list of relevant thesaurus headings. Select the appropriate heading(s) by clicking the box next to it.

Selecting **Explode** will search for your heading, plus any narrower (more specific) headings. **Click Search**.



### *ii) Text Word Searching*

If your concept does not have an appropriate subject heading, you can search for your term as a textword. The computer will search in the title or abstract fields for an exact match of the term.

This method will not guarantee retrieval of relevant material e.g. 'back' will not distinguish between the human back and the word 'back' in any other context. Textword searching will often retrieve irrelevant material, particularly for frequently used terms.

As a general rule, use textword searching when :

- There is no appropriate thesaurus term (e.g. for an uncommon term, acronym, institution)

*or*

- If you wish to broaden your thesaurus search to include alternative words for more exhaustive retrieval.

### *iii) Truncation*

Truncating the term can allow for variations e.g. Allerg\$ will allow for allergy, allergic, allergen.

**Remember that the method(s) you use will depend on :**

- The nature of your topic
- How exhaustively you need to search
- How much time you have available.