

PubMed Tips Sheet March 2010

Searching, Saving and Email Alerts

General search tips for general or advanced PubMed searches

1. Think about the concepts within the question you are asking and any synonyms or alternate words associated with the key concepts that would help you find the answer. For example, if you are interested in whether or not the prevalence of myopia has changed over time then there are three core concepts you need to consider:
 - a. Myopia
 - b. Prevalence OR epidemiology
 - c. Change OR increase OR decrease

These concepts can then be strung together into a search strategy which would look like this:

Myopia AND (Prevalence OR epidemiology) AND (change OR increase OR decrease)

2. Use PICO to help set up an effective search strategy. PICO stands for population/patient, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome. Thinking about your search in this way helps refine your search strategy and therefore affects your search results. This strategy is especially useful when looking for research about a new diagnostic tool, therapy or prognosis.
3. The Medical Subject Heading Database (MeSH) database is a useful tool if you are not finding what you want or need to narrow a search quickly. Click on the MeSH database option on the PubMed Home page. Enter the topic of interest to determine if it is a subject heading. If it is, identify the aspect of the condition or disease you are interested in. You can check that aspect and then use the Send To button to send it to the PubMed Search box. Use the "Search Box with AND" option from the pull down menu. If it is not a MeSH term then think about a broader term that would encompass the condition or disease of interest. For example, if iritis were not a MeSH term then uveitis would be the broader term.

Saving your articles using My NCBI

To save your articles you can print them, email to yourself or download them into bibliographic software such as RefWorks or EndNote. There is also another option. Once you have completed a search and have found articles of interest, you may save them via a free service offered by PubMed. Free registration with My NCBI allows you to create your own collection folders and save articles on a variety of topics. The steps to saving your articles within My NCBI are as follows:

- Log into My NCBI
- Complete a search within PubMed.
- Check off the articles you wish to save
- Click on *Send To* and select *Collections*
- Follow the prompts to name the collection AND/OR add the items to an existing collection.

Saving searches and sending yourself alerts when new research is published on your topic

You may also save your searches and rerun them at a later date or preset the alerting system to run them periodically and send you updates once a month. This process is very straightforward with just a simple list of options to check off. To save your search and set up search alerts you simply:

- Log into My NCBI
- Complete a search within PubMed.
- Click on Save Search just above the search text box
- Follow the prompts to save and name your search
- You will also be prompted as to whether or not you want to send yourself email alerts , and given a list of preferences to check off, when new research is published that fits your saved search

Remember you may contact the WLRC staff through optlib@uwaterloo.ca for assistance.