



3. *Bike helmet and safety fact sheets*. Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Child Health; 1995 CICH publication 54.
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Searching for reviews

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It's not difficult to find reviews. Your favourite journal probably has a review section. Often, though, you want a review on a topic not covered in the journals you have on hand. Then, it is simple to do a MEDLINE search and to limit your retrieval to review articles.

The indexers at the US National Library of Medicine, the producers of MEDLINE, tag all articles that belong to certain publication types, and one of these is "Review." In MEDLINE, a review is defined as the following.

... an article or book published after examination of published material on a subject. It may be comprehensive to various degrees and the time range of material scrutinized may be broad or narrow, but the reviews most often desired are reviews of the current literature. The textual material examined may be equally broad and can encompass, in medicine specifically, clinical material as well as experimental research or case reports. State-of-the-art reviews tend to address more current matters. Reviews of the literature must be differentiated from historical articles on the same subject, but a review of historical literature is also within the scope of this publication type.¹

More specific headings for specific types of reviews are available also;

these are "Review, Academic," "Review, Multicase," "Review of Reported Cases," and "Review, Tutorial." Although these will all be retrieved with the publication type "Review," you can search for the specific types separately.

Reviews on MEDLINE

When searching MEDLINE on Internet Grateful Med, fill out the "Query Terms" boxes, then go to the "Apply Limits" section in the lower part of the screen. Click on the arrow at the right of the "Publ Types" box. From the resulting pull-down menu, you may click on "Review" or on "Meta-analysis" to limit your search to articles of either of those types. The MEDLINE definition of meta-analysis, as a publication type, is as follows.

A quantitative method of combining the results of independent studies (usually drawn from the published literature) and synthesizing summaries and conclusions, which may be used to evaluate therapeutic effectiveness, plan new studies, etc. It is often an overview of clinical trials. It is usually called a meta-analysis by the author or sponsoring body, and should be differentiated from reviews of literature.¹

(Note that if you want to retrieve both reviews and meta-analyses, you will have to do two separate searches).

In some of the other free MEDLINES, limiting retrieval to review articles is slightly more difficult. In PubMed, an experimental MEDLINE from the National Library of Medicine (available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>), you must know the name of the publication type you want, as well as the proper qualifier. If, for example, you wanted to retrieve reviews on hypertension, you would type: hypertension [mh] AND review [pt]. In this case, "mh" is the qualifier for MeSH (Medical Subject Headings), and "pt" is the qualifier for publication type. As long as the qualifiers are inside square brackets, it doesn't matter whether they are in upper or lower case, but be sure to type the Boolean operator, in this case "AND," in upper case.

In Evaluated MEDLINE (available on BioMedNet, at <http://biomednet.com/>), the qualifier must be appended to the term with a colon, eg, hypertension:mh and review:pt. The Boolean operator and qualifiers may be in upper or lower case. Remember to make a phrase out of the publication type if it is more than one word; do this with single quotes or hyphens: eg, 'meta analysis':pt or meta-analysis.pt. For more details and helpful lists of publication types and qualifiers, follow the link "How to search" and look for the section "Restricting by publication type."

Articles about reviews

Suppose, though, that you want to find articles about reviews: for example, how to evaluate them or how to write them. If you are searching MEDLINE, you need to use the MeSH term "Review Literature." In Internet Grateful Med, select Review Literature from the MeSH/Meta list, or simply type "review literature" in the Query Terms box, making sure that the pull-down menu term is set to Subject. Selecting Review Literature as a major topic will retrieve about 80 articles from 1994 to 1997. Examples of useful articles retrieved with the MeSH term Review Literature follow.

- Cook DJ, Mulrow CD, Haynes RB. Systematic reviews: synthesis of best evidence for clinical decisions. *Ann Intern Med* 1997;126:376-80. The authors define and describe systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Systematic reviews summarize large bodies of evidence and help to explain differences among studies on the same question. A systematic review involves the application of scientific strategies, in ways that limit bias, to the assembly, critical appraisal, and synthesis of all relevant studies that address a specific clinical question. A meta-analysis is a type of systematic review that uses statistical methods to combine and summarize the results of several primary studies.

- Shaughnessy AF, Slawson DC. Getting the most from review articles: a guide for readers and writers. *Am Fam Physician* 1997;55:2155-60.

A good medical review article pares down the seemingly overwhelming amount of information available in the literature, but these authors warn against uncritical acceptance. They note that only through teamwork, with both writer and reader taking responsibility for a role, can review articles result in improved patient care.

- Evidence-Based Medicine Working Group. Oxman AD, Cook DJ, Guyatt GH. Users' guides to the medical literature. VI. How to use an overview. *JAMA* 1994;272:1367-71.

One of a series of guides to the medical literature, this article looks at overviews, reviews, and systematic reviews and the differences between them. The full text of all the "User's guides" is available on the World Wide Web at the site of the Evidence-based Medicine Informatics Project at: <http://hiru.hirunet.mcmaster.ca/ebm/>.

- Hutchison BG. Critical appraisal of review articles. *Can Fam Physician* 1993;39:1097-102.

Because the volume of available reviews is vast and their scientific quality varies enormously, family physicians must be able to identify trustworthy reviews quickly. This article outlines practical and flexible guidelines for critical appraisal and discusses the respective roles of review articles and original research reports in guiding clinical practice.

Other sources of reviews

Do not forget nonbibliographic databases as a source of reviews. The Cochrane Library is a collection of databases, one of which is the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. This database, produced by the Cochrane Collaboration, contains the full text of several hundred reviews, and it continues to grow.

Cochrane reviews concentrate on controlled trials. The reviews are

highly structured and systematic, with evidence included or excluded on the basis of explicit quality criteria, to minimize bias. Data are often combined statistically (with meta-analysis) to increase the power of the findings of numerous studies.

The Cochrane Library is available on disk and CD-ROM, with quarterly updates, and by subscription on the Internet. Publishing systematic reviews in an electronic form has advantages over more traditional methods, in that reviews can be easily updated as new evidence emerges. For more details on the work of the Cochrane Collaboration and on how to obtain the Cochrane Library, refer to the Canadian Cochrane Centre website at <http://hiru.mcmaster.ca/cochrane/default.htm>.

Full text of reviews

Sometimes the abstract of a review, such as you will retrieve from MEDLINE, is enough, particularly if it is a well-written structured abstract. More often, you will want the full text of the review. Many journals are now making their content available free on the World Wide Web. For a particularly good example, check out the *British Medical Journal* (available at <http://www.bmj.com/>), which offers a high proportion of full text, and plans to be entirely full text on the Web in the future.

Other journals, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, (available at <http://www.nejm.org/>), offer full-text articles on the Web for a fee. Some database providers, such as Ovid Technologies Ltd (<http://www.ovid.com/>), provide fee-based access to large collections of biomedical journals. Remember that your medical library is still a key source for the full text of review articles. ♣

Reference

1. National Library of Medicine. *Medical subject headings—annotated alphabetical list 1997*. Bethesda, MD: National Library of Medicine; 1996. p. 1-24.

Available

Fenfluramine and dexfenfluramine alert

Health Canada has announced that the US Department of Health and Human Services has issued interim recommendations for medical management of people who took the drugs fenfluramine (eg, Ponderal) and dexfenfluramine. The recommendations were reported in the November 14, 1997, edition of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. More information is available on the US Food and Drug Administration's website at www.fda.gov/cder/news.

Bulletins pédiatriques

Les textes des Bulletins pédiatriques, prêts à photocopier et destinés aux parents, comprennent des informations sur la croissance de l'enfant, son développement, son comportement, ses immunisations, son alimentation, la prévention des accidents et intoxications, et les problèmes de santé fréquents. La deuxième édition a fait l'objet d'une mise à jour et d'une révision complète. Il y a maintenant 11 Bulletins pour chacune des visites périodiques entre la naissance et l'âge de 5 ans. Vous pouvez les commander de René Gagnon, Centre de formation continue, Faculté de médecine, Bureau 1214, Université Laval, Laval, QC G1K 7P4; téléphone (418) 656-5958; télécopieur (418) 656-2465; courrier électronique fmc@fmc.ulaval.ca.

Recommandations au sujet de fenfluramine and dexfenfluramine

Santé Canada a annoncé que le Department of Health and Human Services des États-Unis a publié des recommandations provisoires au sujet des drogues fenfluramine and dexfenfluramine. Les recommandations sont présentées dans le *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* du 14 novembre 1997. Vous pouvez consulter cette information au site web du Direction des produits thérapeutiques à www.fda.gov/cder/news.