How do I find Evidence-based Medicine (EBM) articles on my topic?

Which databases should I use?
The Cochrane Library is the “Gold Standard” for evidence-based practice information. The Cochrane Collaborative has stringently evaluated the research on specific practices, summarized the results, and drawn conclusions. They are best known for their systematic reviews. The Cochrane Library is comprised of 8 databases.

The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, (“Cochrane Reviews”) contains full text systematic review articles produced by the Cochrane Collaborative. The Database of Reviews of Effectiveness (“Other Reviews”) contains abstracts of articles (with the citations) of evidence-based systematic reviews that were not produced by the Cochrane Collaborative. You can use the citations to find the full text of the article in one of our other databases by using the "locate a journal feature."

Be aware that the Cochrane Collaborative may not have produced a review on your specific topic. CINAHL and MEDLINE in EBSCO and PubMed or PubMed Clinical Queries from the National Library of Medicine contain some evidence-based information, but the search will require more expertise on your part. Once you have searched for your specific subject in those databases, you can try certain limits to find the articles that might qualify as evidence-based.

What is the difference between keyword and subject searching?

Subject Headings in a database are from “controlled vocabulary” lists. An indexer reads the article and assigns subject headings from the list. Subject Headings are used in all of the databases. MEDLINE, PubMed & Cochrane use MeSH (Medical Subject Headings). CINAHL has its own subject headings (some duplicate MeSH). Keywords are simply words or phrases that occur in the title, subject headings and the abstract of the article. The computer looks for the terms in the various fields so if an indexer missed a pertinent subject heading for the article you will still be able to find the article.

You can search for keywords and phrases in Cochrane, CINAHL, MEDLINE and PubMed. If you want to be thorough, it is a good idea to search both keywords and subject headings.

Search Strategy (see shaded box at end of document for more details)

When developing your search strategy for any of the databases, consider the following.

- Define terms—review your research question and pull out the main concepts.
- Think of synonyms and ways that you can truncate your terms.
- Consider different spellings of the term like haematological & hematological.
- If you are searching for drug information use brand names and generic.
- Limit and expand the search using “Boolean” operators like AND, OR.
Search Tips

- **AND** searches for both terms: smoking AND cancer
- **OR** searches for either term: infants OR babies
- **NOT** eliminates the term: ulcer NOT pressure
- Truncate term with *: nurs* finds nurse, nurses, nursing

**How do I find articles in the Cochrane Library?**
Enter terms of interest (keywords) in the search box on upper right-hand side. Click “Go”. Results from the full-text Cochrane Reviews are displayed. Links to the other Cochrane databases (DARE, CENTRAL, etc.) are left of the results. To see the full text, click the article title link. See the Cochrane Search Manual (see the EBP page, on Research Guide) for specific search tips.

**How do I search for evidence-based articles in CINAHL and MEDLINE?**

Try the techniques described below. Be sure to look at the abstracts or the actual articles to ascertain whether they are actually evidence-based. When searching CINAHL and MEDLINE, don’t limit your search to full text only. You will eliminate many of the relevant articles if you do that. The full text of the article may well be available in one of our other online databases or in the library in print form. You can look for them by clicking the “Check for Full Text” link below the abstract of the article, checking the Regis Library Catalog (Lumen) or the “Locate a Journal” feature on the library homepage.

**CINAHL**
Once you have searched for your topic in CINAHL, try the following Limits (individually) by clicking the “Show More” link to the left of your search results under Refine your results:
- Click the “Evidence-Based Practice” box.
- Click “Search”.
- Other limits you may want to try include, “Publication Types” such as “Clinical Trial”, “Systematic Review”, and “Practice Guidelines” (hold the control key down to select multiple items).
- Try these limits separately from “Evidence-Based Practice” or the limits will be AND-ed together (only find articles that fit both categories, not either OR).

**MEDLINE**
- Once you have searched for your topic in MEDLINE, use the “Show More” link to the left of your search results under Refine your results. Mid-way down click the box “EBM Reviews”
- Click the “Search” button.
- Another option you may want to try is to select the following items under “Publication Type”: Clinical Trial, Clinical Trial, Phase(s) I-IV, Controlled Clinical Trial, Meta Analysis, Practice Guideline, and Randomized Controlled Trial.
- Try these limits separately from EBM Reviews or the limits will be AND-ed together (only find articles that fit both categories, not either OR).

From CINAHL and MEDLINE articles, click the PDF icon or “Check for Full Text” to look for the full text of the article.
How do I search for evidence-based articles in PubMed?

PubMed is a free source from the National Library of Medicine that includes MEDLINE, Pre-MEDLINE (studies not yet published), other life science journals and online books. In PubMed, systematic reviews cover a broad set of articles that build consensus on biomedical topics.

- Get to PubMed from the Nursing Research Guide “Articles/Databases” tab.
- Try a keyword search in the main page search box. As you type your terms in keywords will start to appear. You can choose one of those if you feel it fits better. Click “search.”
- Results are in the center of the page with Limits on the left side. You can limit to “systematic review” under Article Types and choose other limits as appropriate.
- If you feel you are not finding enough information you can try to use MeSH. The MeSH index can be searched in the same search bar by choosing “MeSH” from the left hand pull down menu.
- Enter your term and click “search.” Any associated MeSH index terms will appear in the center. Choose the ones that fit by clicking the check box in front of the term. Then click “add to search builder” on the right side of the page. You can do this for several terms and use AND or OR, to either limit or broaden the search. When you have all of your terms defined click “Search PubMed.”
- Alternatively, click the “Clinical Queries” link on the main Pubmed page to search for SRs and Clinical trials only.