PubMed: Searching with MeSH

From PubMed’s homepage, click on the MeSH Database link under “More Resources” OR select MeSH from the search dropdown menu.

Type in the term you would like to search then press Search.

From the search term you entered, PubMed will identify potential corresponding medical subject headings. By clicking on one of the resulting terms you will be directed to an informational record, within which you will find options to further narrow the scope of your search. In this example the exercise subject heading is going to be selected.

Note: You are also able to select terms from the result page by placing a check mark next to each related term and adding them to the Search Builder without viewing their respective information record.
Within the subject heading’s information record there is a list of subheadings, which can be selected to narrow the scope of your search. Note: If you are doing a systematic review, it is best to **not** select any subheadings.

From the MeSH term’s informational record you also have the option to search for only results that identify the MeSH term as a major topic – this is accomplished by selecting the “Restrict to MeSH Major Topic”. Note: If you are doing a systematic review, it is best to **not** select this option.

Another option you can utilize in your search is the “Do not include MeSH terms found below this term in the MeSH hierarchy”. This option pertains to PubMed’s tree approach to the categorization of headings. The next image and prompt will explain this option further.
In this example, if you choose to select the “Do not include MeSH terms found below this term in the MeSH hierarchy” option, you eliminate terms listed below the exercise heading from your search. This means that any citations associated with headings such as “cool-down exercise” or “running” would not be included. The screenshot below provides a visual aid to PubMed’s tree structure for headings.

Once you have your subheadings and other options selected, click the “Add to search builder” button. *Note: In this example, no subheadings or options were selected.*

To add additional concepts to your search, type your next term into the search bar at the top of the page. Before pressing the Search button, make sure MeSH is selected in the drop down.
For this second concept, “hip replacement”, there was only one MeSH term that was relevant, so the record was automatically opened. Like the first term, within the subject heading’s record you can select subheadings or other options to narrow the scope of the search.

Once you have chosen to select subheadings or not, you can click on the “Add to search builder” button. Note that you can change the drop down next to this button to “AND” or “OR” depending on how you want to search with your headings. Typically users select “AND” to combine two difference concepts. If you would like to add further MeSH terms, repeat steps above, otherwise press “Search PubMed”.

The results page will appear similar to the image below. To learn more about further narrowing down your results using features available at this point, see the Using filters to get better results instruction document.