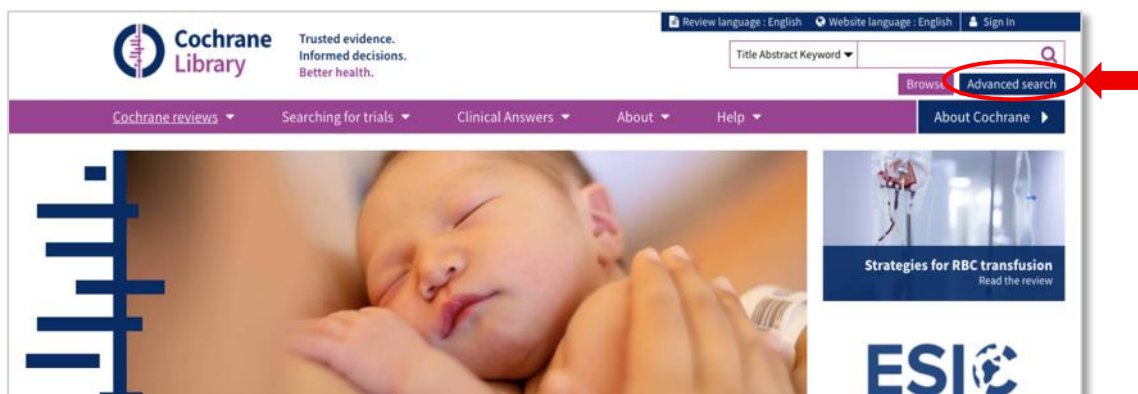


Activity - searching for studies in the Cochrane Library

This is a guided activity on how to search the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) for studies relevant to a systematic review. Step-by step instructions¹ use the example of **Caffeine for daytime sleepiness** but can also be followed for a different review topic.

You will need access to a computer with an internet connection. A subscription to the Cochrane Library is not required, except for optional step 16.

1. **Access CENTRAL.** Open a web browser and go to <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/> and click on **Advanced Search**. This will open the Advanced Search page.



2. **Start searching for your first concept - the population.** In this example, the population is people with sleepiness. Enter your search term '**sleepiness**' in the search box. Check '**Title Abstract Keyword**' is selected in the dropdown list next to the box, and click '**Run search**' to see your retrieved results.

Advanced Search

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save search View saved searches Search help

Did you know you can now select fields from Search manager using the S button (next to the search box)?
Search manager lets you add unlimited search lines, view results per line and access the MeSH browser using the new MeSH button.

Title Abstract Keyword sleepiness

(Word variations have been searched)

+ Clear all

Search limits Send to search manager Run search

¹ Please note the search results and MeSH headings shown in screenshots may differ when you run this activity because they are regularly updated.

Now select **'Send to search manager'**:

Advanced Search

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save search View saved searches Search help

Did you know you can now select fields from Search manager using the **S** button (next to the search box)?
Search manager lets you add unlimited search lines, view results per line and access the MeSH browser using the new **MeSH** button.

Title Abstract Keyword sleepiness

(Word variations have been searched)

+ Search limits **Send to search manager** Run search

Clear all

Filter your results

Cochrane Reviews 108	Cochrane Protocols 1	Trials 7141	Editorials 0	Special Collections 0	Clinical Answers 1
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108 Cochrane Reviews matching **sleepiness** in **Title Abstract Keyword** - (Word variations have been searched)

3. This will open the **Search manager** page:

Advanced Search

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save this search View/Share saved searches

+ #1 (sleepiness):ti,ab,kw Limits

- + #2 Type a search term or use the S or MeSH buttons to compose S MeSH Limits

Clear all Highlight

Questions

How many records did your search find?

Note: your answer may be different to the one shown in the picture.

Can you think of alternative terms for sleepiness?

Consider synonyms, related terms, opposites, truncation, etc. List your suggested search terms here.

- To add additional terms to your search, click on the **'Search'** tab on the top menu bar, and repeat Step 2, entering a new search term and selecting **'Send to search manager'** instead of **'Run search'** to build your search strategy.

Advanced Search

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save search View saved searches Search help

Did you know you can now select fields from Search manager using the **S** button (next to the search box)?
Search manager lets you add unlimited search lines, view results per line and access the MeSH browser using the new **MeSH** button.

Title Abstract Keyword fatigue

(Word variations have been searched)

+ Search limits **Send to search manager** Run search

Clear all

- Combine your 'title, abstract and keyword' search terms.**

When all your terms related to sleepiness have been added to the **Search manager**, use the appropriate Boolean operator (AND, OR, NOT) and type in the row numbers that you want to combine.

Note that you need to include a hashtag in your row numbers. In this example OR is used to search for row 1 (sleepiness) or row 2 (fatigue).

Then select **'Continue'**.

Advanced Search

Search Search manager Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save this search View/Share saved searches Search help

Print search history

+	#1	(sleepiness);ti,ab,kw	S	Limits	7251
(Word variations have been searched)					
+	#2	(fatigue);ti,ab,kw	S	Limits	51594
(Word variations have been searched)					
	#3	#1 or #2		Cancel	Continue

- Search for MeSH headings.** Click the **'Medical terms (MeSH)'** tab at the top of the page.

Advanced Search

Search Search manager **Medical terms (MeSH)** PICO search

View saved searches Search help

7. This will open the **MeSH** search page. Enter 'sleepiness' in the search box. Automatically, the form will suggest terms.

Select "Sleepiness, Daytime" (for "Daytime Sleepiness"), then click '**Look up**'.

Advanced Search

Search Search manager **Medical terms (MeSH)** PICO search

View saved searches

Did you know the MeSH browser features are also available on the Search manager tab by selecting the **MeSH** button?

Search manager lets you add unlimited search lines, view results per line, and select fields using the **S** button (next to the search box).

Sleepiness

Sleepiness

Sleepiness, Daytime

Sleepiness, Excessive Daytime

Select subheadings / qualifiers

Look up

8. 'Sleepiness, daytime' will automatically map to **Disorders of Excessive Somnolence**. Definition of the term is provided at the top of the screen.

In the central column you can see **the MeSH Trees** (lists of narrower terms) for Disorders of Excessive Somnolence. All trees are 'exploded' by default, which means that you can search any narrower terms listed below your term on the trees, as well as your selected term. For this exercise, do not change the default selection.

Click '**Add to search manager**' button:

Definition

Disorders of Excessive Somnolence - Disorders characterized by hypersomnolence during normal waking hours that may impair cognitive functioning. Subtypes include primary hypersomnia disorders (e.g., IDIOPATHIC HYPERSOMNOLENCE; NARCOLEPSY; and KLEINE-LEVIN SYNDROME) and secondary hypersomnia disorders where excessive somnolence can be attributed to a known cause (e.g., drug affect, MENTAL DISORDERS, and SLEEP APNEA SYNDROME). (From J Neurol Sci 1998 Jan 8;153(2):192-202; Principles and Practice of Sleep Medicine, 2nd ed, p320)

Thesaurus Matches

Exact Term Match

Disorders of Excessive Somnolence

Synonyms: Hypersomnolence; Hypersomnias; Hypersomnia; Hypersomnolence Disorder, Primary; Primary Hypersomnia Disorder; Hypersomnia Disorder, Primary; Primary Hypersomnolence Disorders; Primary Hypersomnolence Disorder; Hypersomnolence Disorders, Primary; Primary Hypersomnia Disorders; DOES (Disorders of Excessive Somnolence); Somnolence Disorder, Excessive; Excessive Somnolence Disorders; Hypersomnolence Disorder; Hypersomnolence Disorders; Excessive Somnolence Disorder; DOESs (Disorders of Excessive Somnolence); Recurrent Hypersomnias; Hypersomnia, Recurrent; Recurrent Hypersomnia; Hypersomnolence Disorders, Secondary; Secondary Hypersomnia Disorder; Secondary

MeSH Trees

MeSH term - **Disorders of Excessive Somnolence**

☒ Explode all trees

☐ Single MeSH term (unexploded)

☐ Explode selected trees

Select

☒ **Tree number 1**

Nervous System Diseases [+17]

Sleep Wake Disorders [+2]

Dyssomnias [+3]

Sleep Disorders, Intrinsic [+5]

Disorders of Excessive Somnolence [+3]

Idiopathic Hypersomnia

Kleine-Levin Syndrome

Narcolepsy [+1]

Nocturnal Myoclonus Syndrome

Search Results

There are **693** results for your search on

- MeSH descriptor: Disorders of Excessive Somnolence
- Explode all trees

Add to search manager

Trials

Cochrane Reviews

Save search

View

9. This will return you to the **Search manager** page. Scroll down to see that the MeSH term has been added to your search strategy.

Advanced Search

Search **Search manager** Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save this search View/Share saved searches Search help

View fewer lines Print search history

+	-	+	#1	(sleepiness):ti,ab,kw	S	Limits 7251
				(Word variations have been searched)		
	-	+	#2	(fatigue):ti,ab,kw	S	Limits 51595
				(Word variations have been searched)		
	-	+	#3	#1 or #2	Limits	57529
	-	+	#4	MeSH descriptor: [Disorders of Excessive Somnolence] explode all trees	MeSH	674

10. **Combine all your population related searches.** In the **Search** field, combine each of your search terms together using the Boolean operator OR (e.g. in this example, enter **#3 or #4**).

Then click the **'Continue'** button.

Advanced Search

Search **Search manager** Medical terms (MeSH) PICO search

Save this search View/Share saved searches Search help

Print search history

+	-	+	#1	(sleepiness):ti,ab,kw	S	Limits 7251
				(Word variations have been searched)		
	-	+	#2	(fatigue):ti,ab,kw	S	Limits 51595
				(Word variations have been searched)		
	-	+	#3	#1 or #2	Limits	57529
	-	+	#4	MeSH descriptor: [Disorders of Excessive Somnolence] explode all trees	MeSH	674
			#5	#3 or #4	Cancel	Continue

Questions

How many records did your combined search for sleepiness find?

The intervention in this review is caffeine. Can you think of search terms for caffeine?

Consider synonyms, related terms, opposites, truncation, etc. List your suggested search terms here.

11. **Now search for the next concept** – in this example we will search for the intervention of caffeine.

Using the **Search manager** and **Medical terms (MeSH)** pages, enter your search terms for caffeine and combine them using the Boolean operator OR, following steps 3-11.

12. **Combine both of your search concepts.** In the Search Manager page, combine your search terms for sleepiness together with your search terms for caffeine using the Boolean operator AND (i.e. using the row numbers in which you combined each set of terms using OR in your search history).

The screenshot shows the 'Search manager' tab in a web application. It displays a list of search history items, each with a row number, a minus/plus button, and the search terms. The items are as follows:

Row	Minus/Plus	Search Terms
#1	-	(sleepiness):ti,ab,kw (Word variations have been searched)
#2	-	(fatigue):ti,ab,kw
#3	-	#1 or #2
#4	-	MeSH descriptor: [Disorders of Excessive Somnolence] explode all trees
#5	-	#3 or #4
#6	-	(caffeine):ti,ab,kw
#7	-	MeSH descriptor: [Caffeine] explode all trees
#8	-	#6 or #7
#9	-	#5 and #8

Annotations on the left side of the screenshot:

- A red bracket groups rows #1 through #5, labeled 'Sleepiness terms'.
- A red bracket groups rows #6 through #8, labeled 'Caffeine terms'.
- A red arrow points to row #9, labeled 'Sleepiness terms AND caffeine terms'.

Question

How many records did your combined search for sleepiness and caffeine find in total?

Note: your answer and the search terms used may be different to those shown in the picture.

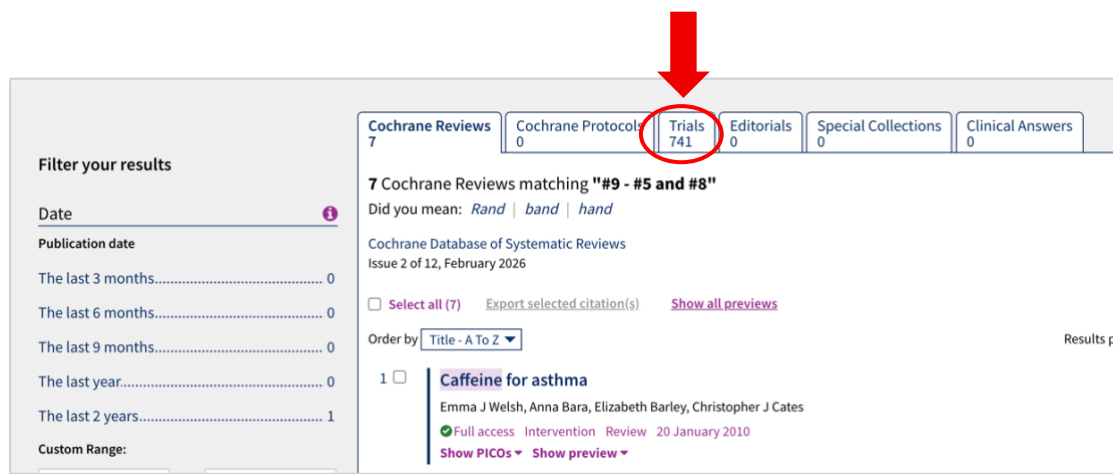
13. **View your search results.** Click on the boxed number in the final row of your search strategy. This will display your final search results.



Search bar: #5 and #8 Limits 748

14. By default, the Cochrane Library will display results found in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

To see results found in CENTRAL, click the **Trials** link.



Filter your results

Date ?

Publication date

The last 3 months..... 0

The last 6 months..... 0

The last 9 months..... 0

The last year..... 0

The last 2 years..... 1

Custom Range:

Cochrane Reviews 7

Cochrane Protocols 0

Trials 741

Editorials 0

Special Collections 0

Clinical Answers 0

7 Cochrane Reviews matching "#9 - #5 and #8"

Did you mean: *Rand* | *band* | *hand*

Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

Issue 2 of 12, February 2026

☐ Select all (7) [Export selected citation\(s\)](#) [Show all previews](#)

Order by Title - A To Z

Results per page

1 ☐ **Caffeine for asthma**

Emma J Welsh, Anna Bara, Elizabeth Barley, Christopher J Cates

Full access Intervention Review 20 January 2010

[Show PICO's](#) [Show preview](#)

Questions

How many records did your combined search find in the CENTRAL clinical trials database?

Note: your answer may be different to the one shown in the picture.

15. Export your results (optional step for subscribers)

[NOTE TO TRAINERS]: These steps are included to show learners how results can be exported. However, it will only be possible to practise this step if learners have a subscription to the Cochrane Library.

Search results can be exported to your reference management software (note: for CENTRAL (Trials), the citation export options will only display if a user has a subscription to the Cochrane Library).

Click the **Select all** button, then **Export selected citation(s)**.



16. This will open an options screen.

You can select the format in which the results will be downloaded. Tick the box to include abstracts in your exported results. Then press '**Download**'

