When your term isn’t a MeSH

Sometimes when you enter a term in the Thesaurus, that term will not be a MeSH. You might be directed by the Thesaurus to the MeSH. In Figure 15 the term entered was *organ donation* and the program redirected the search to the MeSH Tissue Donors.

![Figure 15. Redirecting a Thesaurus search term to the MeSH](image)

You can click in the box to left of the term you typed in and the search will proceed as though you had used the MeSH.

Using Suggest

Sometimes your search term may not find a MeSH, and the program doesn’t redirect you to the MeSH. Figure 16 shows what happens when oral carcinoma is used as the search term in the Thesaurus.

![Figure 16. Thesaurus fails to find a MeSH for the term ‘oral carcinoma’](image)
Finding a MeSH is so important that it’s worth persisting. Your best option is usually to think of another term to try in the Thesaurus. If you can’t think of another term you can ask the Medline program to Suggest a MeSH.

1. **Click Suggest on the right hand side of the screen**
   A new subject box will appear.

2. **Click once in the Subject box and type your term**
   e.g. oral carcinoma.

3. **Click on ‘Suggest Terms’**.
   The program will produce a ranked list of MeSH taken from references containing your term in their titles, abstracts, or MeSH.
   The MeSH at the top of the list is the one that occurs most frequently in the references containing the term you typed into ‘Suggest’. Remember that different subsets of Medline might produce different results in a Suggest search. Figure 17 shows the result of typing in the term ‘oral carcinoma’ into Suggest using Medline 1997 to 1999.

![Figure 17. Ranked list of Suggested MeSH](image)

4. **Click in the box to the left of the MeSH you want to search.**

5. **Click on ‘Search Checked Subjects’, or ‘Explode Checked Subjects’**.
   or you may consider it useful to click on the underlined MeSH you’ve found from Suggest to see the broader and narrower terms listed before you explode.

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Refining Searches

No matter how specific you make your search it’s still possible that Medline will leave too large a number of references to be useful. There are five responses to this.

1. Use major MeSH headings.
2. Use the Limit feature.
3. Use other search terms to narrow your search.
4. Look for a recent text if there is so much literature around on the topic.
5. Ask the Research Librarians, Maureen Bell or Mick Draper for help.

Major MeSH

Medical subject headings are divided into two groups. Major headings are given to identify the main subject of an article. Minor MeSH are used for less significant topics covered in a journal article. Searching a MeSH with or without exploding will search both the major and minor subject headings. If you want the articles you retrieve to be highly relevant you can search only the major MeSH. There is still the option to Explode.

1. Click on ‘Searches’ on the right hand side of the screen, or on ‘Back to Search’ at the top of the screen.
2. Make sure that the ‘Words anywhere’ button on top of the ‘Find’ box is checked.
3. Type mouth neoplasms in mjme into the ‘Find’ box.

The command ‘in mjme’ tells Medline to look in the major MeSH field of each reference to find those references that contain mouth neoplasms. Figure 18 shows the search as it should be entered.

Figure 18. Searching for major MeSH
4 Click on ‘Start Search’
Medline restricts the references to those where the MeSH is one of the major aspects of the articles (Fig. 19).

Subheadings in Major MeSH

If you know the appropriate subheadings associated with a MeSH you can include these in a major MeSH search.

5 Click on ‘Back to Search.’
6 In the ‘Find’ box type.
   e.g. mouth neoplasms/chemistry, congenital in mjme.
7 Click on Start Search.

Exploding Major MeSH Searches

To Explode a Major MeSH search and so find all the more specific Major MeSH associated with a topic just add the word 'explode' to the commands in the ‘Find’ box

![Figure 19 Entering commands for exploding Major MeSH](image)

Summary

1 In the ‘Find’ box type the MeSH you want to use as the major heading.
   Precede this command with 'explode' to include all the more specific MeSH.
2 If you want to add subheadings put a forward slash / after the MeSH (no spaces are needed).
3 Type in the subheadings you want, separated by commas.
   Typing the MeSH without subheadings will ensure that Medline searches for all the subheadings.
4 When all the subheadings you want are typed in, type a space followed by in mjme.
5 Click on Start Search.
Figure 20  Comparing MeSH and Major MeSH searches

If you compare #1 with #4, #2 with #6, and #3 with #7 you can see the reduction in references found. These articles found using Major MeSH should also be more relevant!

**Limits**

Limits are a special category of MeSH, such as language, publication type, and checktags, that are routinely assigned to each article indexed. E.g. an article will be indexed as being ‘English’ or ‘French’ or ‘Russian’ etc in the ‘Language’ field of the reference.

**Language**

1. Click in the box to the left of English below the ‘Find’ box
2. Type the set number of the search you want to limit

In the following example #1 (set 1), a major subject heading search will be limited to references to documents in English (Fig. 21).
3 Click on ‘Start Search’

*Medline* limits the references to documents written in English (Fig. 22).

![Image of search interface]

**Figure 22. The result of limiting a search to English**

**Other Limits**

1 Click on the Set Other Limits box.
This is just below the English box (Fig. 22). The ‘Limit Your Search’ screen appears.

2 Scroll down until you reach a set of appropriate limits e.g. TG-Checktags: (Fig. 23).

![Image of the Other Limits screen]

**Figure 23. The Other Limits screen.**

The Checktags limit box allows you to limit references found by your search to articles on humans, or males, females, animals etc.
3 Scroll down within the limits (e.g. Checktags) box until you come to a limit you want to impose (e.g. HUMAN).
4 Click once on the limit. This will ensure that searches in the Find box will be limited to articles on humans or both humans and animals.

![TG-Checktags: ENGLISH-ABSTRACT, FEMALE, HUMAN, IN-VITRO, MALE. To select multiples, hold down the shift, ctrl, or command key and click.]

Figure 24. Limiting a search to human.

You can click on Set Limits (in the upper right of the screen) at this stage, or you can continue and add other limits.

**Publication Type**

You can make your search more relevant and reduce the number of references found by using Publication Type limits. There are several quite useful limits including

*ARTICLE*  
For finding articles rather than editorials, letters, etc

*CLINICAL TRIAL PHASE III*  
*CLINICAL TRIAL PHASE IV*  
*CONTROLLED CLINICAL TRIAL*  
*META ANALYSIS*  
*PRACTICE GUIDELINE*  
*RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL*

For finding articles that used evidence based practice methods. You can hold down the Ctrl key while clicking on each of these publication types to include all of them in your limits.

*REVIEW*  
For finding articles that review the literature in a particular area. Review articles are often useful to read if you are unfamiliar with the discipline.

You need to be wary of using *CASES* as not many case studies seem to have this publication type added!
5  Click on Set Limits.

Medline returns you to the search screen.
6 Type a new search, or the set number(s) of a previous search or searches into the find box (Fig. 25).

Figure 25. Running a search in the ‘Find’ box to include Limits.

7 Click on ‘Start Search’

Medline limits the search (Fig. 26).

Figure 26 Default display of a Medline reference limited to English language articles including human subjects and several publication types.

Notice that some details of the search are given at the top left of the screen. Note also that to apply limits to searches you have to run them in the ‘Find’ box as above.
Age Group MeSH

Age groups are very useful MeSH to limit searches.
1. Click on Thesaurus and type 'age' into the 'Subject' box.
2. Click on Go to Subject

![Image of Thesaurus search for Age Group MeSH]

Figure 27. Searching for age group MeSH.

3. Click on Age Groups (Fig. 27).
This takes you to a screen from which you can choose particular age groups either under Adult or Child (Fig. 28).

![Image of Age Group MeSH screen]

Figure 28. Age Group MeSH screen from where you can search for particular age groups to limit searches.

Once you've searched using an age group MeSH you can combine this with a subject search (Fig. 55) using AND logic which is explained below.