

2 - DEFINING YOUR SEARCH TERM(S) - MEDICAL SUBJECT HEADINGS (MeSH)



DoctorInternet

Another axiom in doing literature research is: “the accuracy of your search terms determines the accuracy of your search results”.

MEDLINE uses a controlled vocabulary called **Medical Subjects Headings** or MeSH. This formal vocabulary is established by high-level officials at the National Library of Medicine, and although essentially invisible, it is one of the most important functions of the system. Indeed, it is only by means of such a controlled vocabulary that diversified information can be cataloged in a unified method or taxonomy, without which coherent searching would be impossible. To proceed to more advanced searching, it will be necessary for you to become familiar with how to find the precise MeSH term(s) for your subject.

The MeSH vocabulary is continually updated. Each year, hundreds of new concepts are added, and thousands of modifications are made. The current MeSH includes more than 19,000 main headings, 110,000 Supplementary Concept Records, and an entry vocabulary of over 300,000 terms. Listed in the Glossary of this book are the MeSH terms for all diseases - some 4,000. The Glossary on the DoctorInternet.com web-site and CD ROM contains all 19,000 main headings for all subject in biology and medicine. The MEDLINE, MeSH vocabulary is fairly standardized and would be used by most other databases. However, there are some exceptions. For example, most types of cancer are called “neoplasms” in MeSH, while the National Cancer Institute uses the term “cancer” - e.g., “breast neoplasms” in MEDLINE and “breast cancer” in CancerNet.

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2.1 The MeSH Browser. Log to MEDLINE, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed>. When beginning a search or at any point while in the process of formulating a search, you may define your term(s) by selecting the link to the “**MeSH Browser**” which is located in the left-hand column. Indeed, it is usually best to initially structure your search in this Browser. Select the link.

Enter one or more search terms, or click [Preview/Index](#) for advanced searching.

- Enter [author names](#) as smith jc. Initials are optional.
- Enter [journal titles](#) in full or as MEDLINE abbreviations. Use the [Journal Browser](#) to find journal titles.

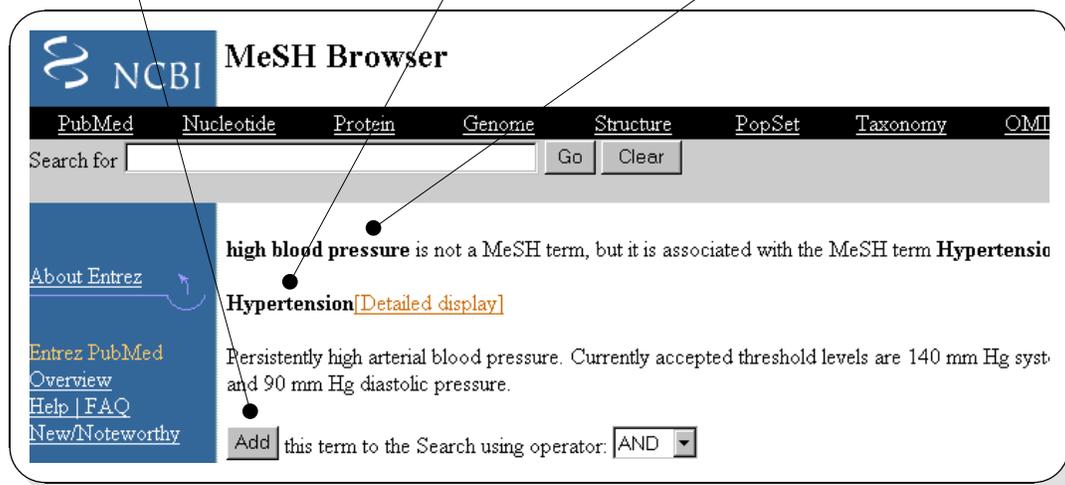
PubMed, a service of the National Library of Medicine, provides access to over 11 million citations from MEDLINE and additional life science journals. PubMed includes links to many sites providing full text articles and other related resources.

2.2 Preliminary term. You are now in the **MeSH Browser**. In the **Search** box, type in your desired term and then select the “**Go**” button.

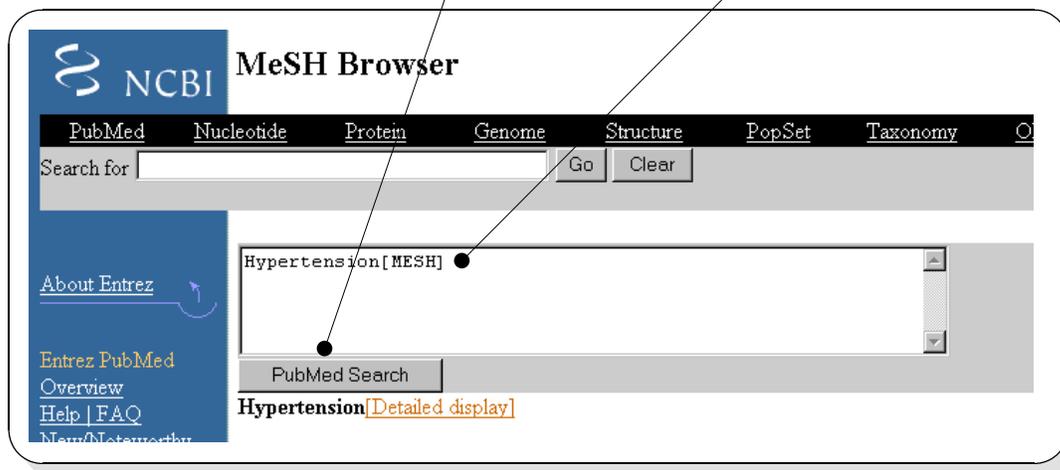
MeSH is NLM's controlled vocabulary used for indexing articles in PubMed. MeSH terminology provides a consistent way to retrieve information that may use different terminology for the same concepts.

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2.3 The MeSH Term. Note that we have been using the term “**high blood pressure**”; but that is not the MeSH term. Instead, “**Hypertension**” is the official term. Although, you do, in fact, obtain relevant citations with “high blood pressure” because of an interpreter call the Metathesaurus, you will obtain more information with the proper MeSH term. Select the “**Add**” button to change the nomenclature.

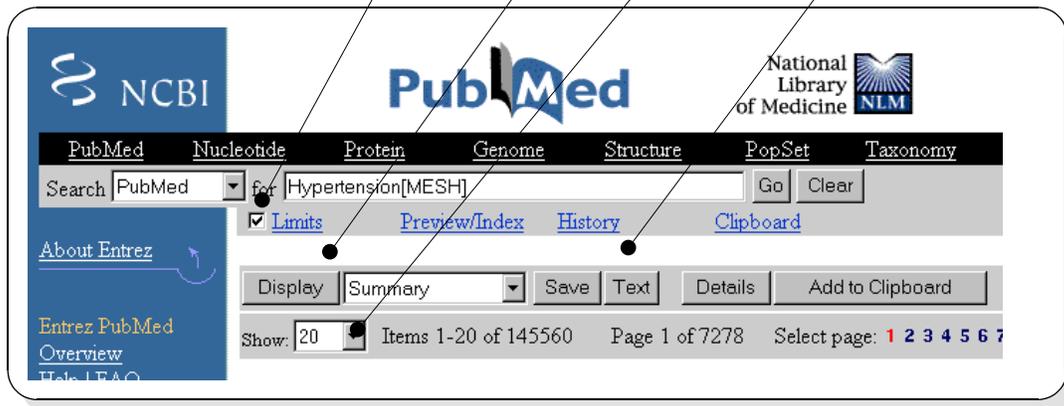


2.4 Perform the search. Your search term is now set for “**Hypertension**”, and you may launch the search by selecting the “**PubMed Search**” button. (Do not use the “Go” button!) There are other important functions on this page, but they will be explained later.



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2.5 Set options and retrieve. (See Procedure 1.5 - 1.8, pages 28-31.) Having performed the search from the MeSH Browser, you are returned to the main page where you may define the options for “**Limits**”, “**Display**”, “**Show**”, and “**Text**” retrieval, all of which have been previously explained.



2.6 Expert Summary.

Expert Summary

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- 1 Log to MEDLINE [<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed>].
- 2 - Select the “**MeSH Browser**” link.
- 3 - Type in your term and select “**Go**” button.
- 4 - Note the proper terminology and select the “**Add**” button.
- 5 - Perform the Search by selecting the button “**PubMed Search**”.
- 6 - Set Options as in Procedure 1.5 et seq., pages 28-31.