Ovid MEDLINE Searching: The 7 Steps that Matter!

SEARCH EXAMPLE: Locate Articles about Prenatal Diagnosis for Trisomy 21

STEP 1: Enter Search Query

- Enter only one search term at a time, for example, “prenatal diagnosis”
- Be sure the box for Map Term to Subject Heading is checked.
- Click Search

STEP 2: Mapping to Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)

Mapping Display: Ovid automatically matches your search term with the controlled vocabulary or Medical Subject Heading (MeSH). Searching “prenatal diagnosis” resulted in an exact match on a MeSH term “Prenatal Diagnosis”.

Auto Explode: To see the broader or narrower MeSH terms around “Prenatal Diagnosis”, click on the blue hyperlinked MeSH term which will take you to a page which shows this MeSH heading in context to other related terms.

Ovid is pre-set to automatically explode your MeSH term. Exploding will retrieve results that contain “Prenatal Diagnosis” in combination with all its narrower, more specific terms such as “Amniocentesis” and “Chorionic Villi Sampling”.

Focus: Check the Focus box if you wish to restrict your “Prenatal Diagnosis” search retrieval to a subset of articles where the subject is considered to be the major focus of the article. Note: choosing to focus your search term at this point may greatly reduce your search results.

Scope Note: Click the information icon to view the Scope Note. This provides additional information about the selected MeSH term, such as its definition and date it entered the database.
STEP 3: Subheadings

**Subheadings** apply directly to the term you are searching, and are a good way to limit to articles about a particular aspect of your concept – like using the subheadings “Methods” or “Adverse Effects” with the MeSH term “Prenatal Diagnosis”. Apply as many subheadings as you like from the list to a MeSH term. The default if none are selected is to “Include All Subheadings.”

STEP 4: Enter Your Second Search Concept

Enter your second search concept “Trisomy 21” and repeat the steps for searching: mapping to a Medical Subject Heading (in this case “Trisomy 21” maps to the MeSH term “Down Syndrome”) and applying All Subheadings.

STEP 5: Combine Search Statements

To Combine: Click on the search statements you wish to combine in the Search History box. An additional option is to enter the search set numbers combined with an “And” on the search line as in the example above.
STEP 6: Limit Your Retrieval

Once you have combined your search statements and you are ready to take a look at your retrieval – you may want to apply some Limits.

Limit options can be found below the search box. The complete Limit options can be found by clicking on the “Additional Limits” button. Be sure to limit the years as you are searching back to 1950. There are also limits for Human, Age Groups, English Language, and Publication Types among other choices.

STEP 7: Keyword Searching and Truncation

Keyword Searching: In some cases your search concept does not have a corresponding MeSH term. My search for “prenatal risk calculation” is an example of a search concept that does not map to a best MeSH term. The Mapping Screen found relevant MeSH terms, such as “Prenatal Diagnosis” – but none are specific enough. In this case, you can select the bottom option of searching the term as a Keyword. A Keyword search looks for an exact match in the title and abstract fields of each MEDLINE record.

Truncation: If the word you are searching could have variant endings (e.g. s, ing) return to the main search box and add a truncation symbol to the end of the word where it could begin to vary. The Ovid truncation symbols are the asterisk (*) and the dollar sign ($).