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Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) in PubMed

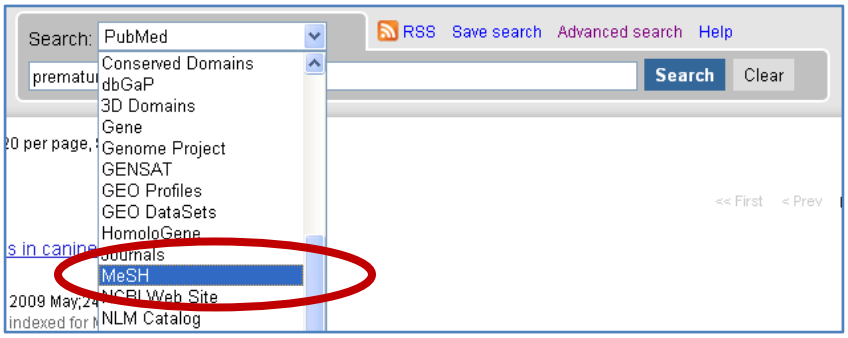
MeSH is NLM's vocabulary for indexing articles for MEDLINE/PubMed.

Use MeSH for more relevant search results
In the example (shown at right) the search *premature labor AND drug therapy*, limited to Review articles published in 2004 or later, retrieves 146 citations.

- Inspection shows that treatment of premature labor is not the focus of many of these citations.
- Rather than go through 146 citations to find the ones you need, you decide to refine your search with MeSH.

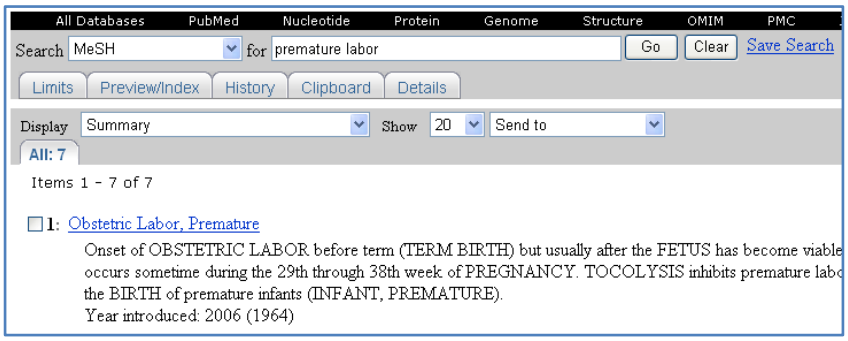
Step 1: Identify a MeSH heading for your main concept.

- **Select the MeSH Database**
  Use the Search drop-down menu to select *MeSH* instead of *PubMed*.



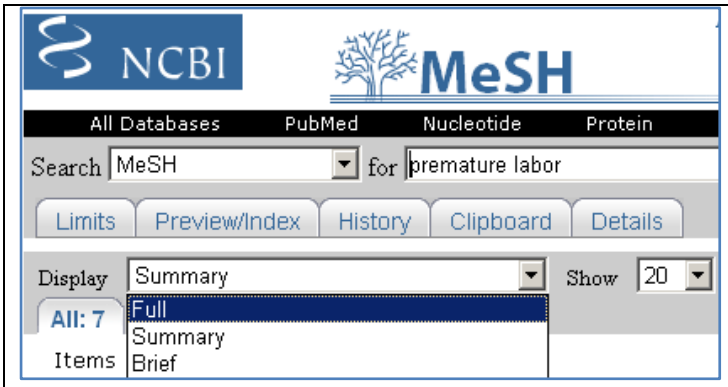
- **Search for the Medical Subject Heading that corresponds to your patient or problem**
  Enter your search term in the query box and click Search.

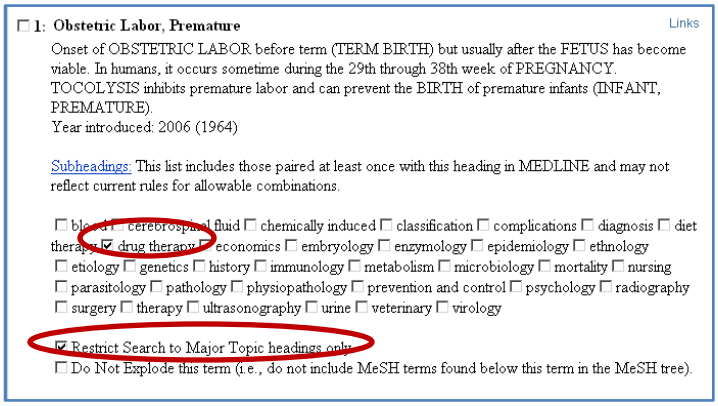
- **Review possible MeSH matches**
  Terms are displayed in Summary format. The definition of each concept follows the term.
  - ➔ In our example, the keyword phrase *premature labor* corresponds to the first result: *Obstetric Labor, Premature*.

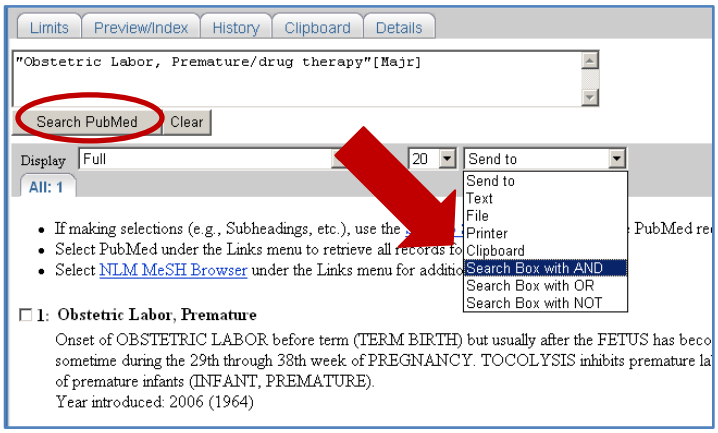


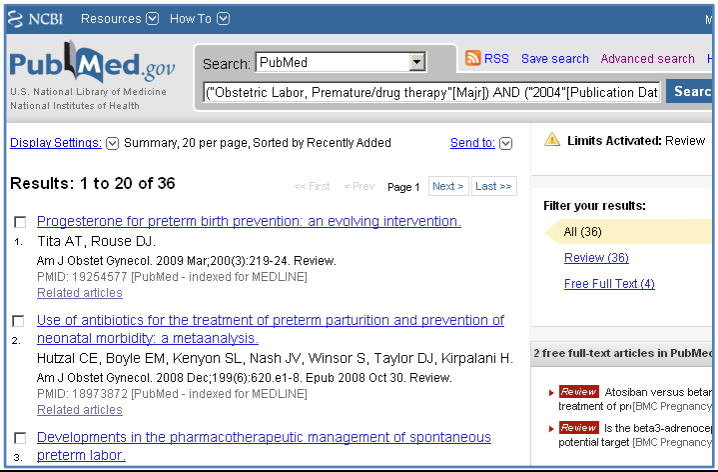
- **Try a simple MeSH search**
  You can select a MeSH heading from the first MeSH search results page and use it in a PubMed search with the keywords *drug therapy*. However, in our example (shown at right), this only reduces our search retrieval to 126 citations from 146. And, many of these are still not focused on treatment of premature labor.

You often need to add Subheadings or specify Major Topic headings to precisely focus your search!









Step 2: Use the tools in Full Display: Subheadings and Major Topic headings

First, change to the Full Display view

Click the Display drop down menu and then click "Full" to change from the Summary display to the Full display (depending on your search, you may already be in Full Display view).

Note: You can also click on a MeSH heading in Summary display to change to the Full display.

In Full Display you can

- **Check off subheadings**

  Attaching subheadings to a MeSH term ensures that heading and subheading are coordinated.

  In this example, we are ensuring retrieval of citations about *drug therapy of premature labor*, not drug therapy of other conditions, such as infection, that may cause premature labor.

- **Check off "Restrict Search to Major Topic headings only"**

  This ensures that the articles address treatment of premature labor as a primary focus. Use this option carefully—it can be powerful, but it may eliminate relevant articles.

Step 3: Run the search

- **Click the "Send to" drop-down menu and then click "Search Box with AND"**

  A new search box appears above the *Display* and *Send to* buttons. The selected MeSH topic and subheading(s) are in the box.

  Note: the top MeSH database query box is still available. You can use it to find more MeSH to add to your search query

- Click the "Search PubMed button" to search with the MeSH terms

  To add in the date range (2004-present), return to the Advanced Search screen. The article type (Review) limit is "sticky" and doesn't need to be set again.

Step 4: Check out the results now

In our example, we have focused our retrieval from 146 to 36 citations. More importantly, these citations directly address our question of drug therapy in premature labor.