



Choosing your keyword search terms

Here is a search scenario:

What are the effects of exercise on Diabetes Type 2?

You will need to identify the main keywords or key concepts from your research question:

- Exercise
- Diabetes Type 2

You will then need to think about synonyms for your keywords. For example, in this case, what type of exercise are you interested in? Searching just on the word **exercise** will not find studies that are specifically about walking, swimming, running, cycling, etc. For this example, we're going to assume we are interested in swimming and walking.

Keywords	Synonyms
Exercise	Exercises, exercising, swim, swims, swimming, walk, walks, walking
Diabetes Type 2	Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Type 2 Diabetes, Type 2, Diabetes Mellitus, Diabetes Type II, Diabetes Mellitus Type II, Type II Diabetes, Type II Diabetes Mellitus, T2DM, T2D

You will also need to think of any abbreviations that might be used or different names for the condition e.g. non-insulin dependent diabetes, late onset diabetes, etc.

Search strategy tips and tricks

Subject indexes

Certain databases use a controlled vocabulary or subject indexes which allow you to search a thesaurus and locate narrower or broader terms. Exploding the subject term means you will automatically retrieve the narrower terms. Subject indexes include MeSH in Medline, and Emtree in Embase.

E.g. The MeSH term for Diabetes Type 2 is: **Diabetes Mellitus, Type 2/**



Using truncation

If you want to search on the plural, singular and other variations of the same word you can use truncation:

exercis* will find **exercise, exercises, exercising, exercised**

Do not truncate too early in a word – e.g. **exer*** would find the above but also **exercycle, exergonic, exertion**, and other words you are not interested in.

The most common truncation symbol is the asterisk (*) but some databases use different symbols – check the database’s help pages to be sure.

Using wildcards

Wildcards are useful when you have US and UK spellings for words. A wildcard search will allow you to replace one character in a search term or to add an extra character:

randomi#ed = **randomized** or **randomised**

behavio?r = **behavior** or **behaviour**

Databases use different wildcard symbols – check the database’s help pages.

Phrase searching

Normally when you put two words into a database search it will find those two words anywhere in the title/abstract/keywords, etc. If you want to force the database to do a phrase search then enclose it in speech marks (“...”).

“diabetes mellitus” = those words next to each other, in that order

Proximity (adjacency) searching

Finds one keyword within a specified number of words of the other, in any order:

Diabetes ADJ4 “Type 2” will find **Diabetes within four words of Type 2** (Diabetes Type 2, Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Type 2 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus, etc.)



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This type of searching is particularly useful when you have a number of phrases that may be used to describe the same thing, as with the example above.

Databases use different proximity operators (ADJ, NEAR, N) – check the database help pages.

If you have any questions or need any help, please contact us via library-researchsupport@nottingham.ac.uk