How do I search MeSH in MEDLINE?

MeSH (medical subject headings) is the National Library of Medicine’s controlled vocabulary thesaurus. Each bibliographic reference is associated with a set of MeSH terms assigned to describe the content of an article. There are more than 19,000 main headings in MeSH, as well as thousands of cross-references that assist in finding the most appropriate MeSH headings. MeSH terms are arranged in a hierarchy, or “tree structure,” that permits searching at various levels of detail, from the most general to more narrow levels, to find the most precise terms. Subject specialists at the National Library of Medicine update MeSH annually.

MeSH records include indexing annotations, scope notes, entry vocabulary, history notes, and allowable qualifiers. MeSH headings can be exploded to retrieve all references indexed to the term, as well as all references indexed to any narrower term(s). Searches can be limited to Major Headings where MeSH headings indicate the main focus of an article. Searches can also be qualified with specific subheadings, to improve the precision of a search.

To search within MeSH:

1. To browse a list of subject headings available in the database, click the MeSH button on the blue sub-toolbar. Users can search MeSH in MEDLINE three different ways:
   - **Term Begins With** - Enter a term in the Browse for field and choose Term Begins With. An alphabetical list is displayed.
   - **Term Contains** - Enter a term in the Browse for field and choose Term Contains. The term searched appears first, followed by terms that contain the term in alphabetical order.
   - **Relevancy Ranked** - Enter a term in the Browse for field and choose Relevancy Ranked. The exact match for the term appears first in the list, followed by the relevancy ranked list.

2. Mark the check box to the left of a term.

3. Click Search Database. Your search query finds articles with the term as a MeSH Heading.