

Quick Guides to Searching for Health Information

BASIC

Don't rely on Google's "I Feel Lucky" button. Here are five tips for improving your searches.

1. Try the advanced search.
2. Use quotation marks (to group words as phrases).
3. Use different words (to describe the same idea).
4. Change the number of words in the search box: More words = fewer results; fewer words = more results.
5. Get rid of oddballs: Getting weird results? Pick a word from the oddball results, and add it to your search with a minus sign right before it (no spaces). This will "throw out" that idea from your search.

Always remember the bottom line: it's your health, ask more questions.

ADVANCED

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|---|---|
| F Frame your search; phrase the question | S Select a search engine; search |
| R Relevance (i.e., what is most important?) | E Evaluate |
| I Irrelevance (i.e., what is not searchable or not answerable?) | C Cite what was found |
| A Alternates (i.e., find other terms for the most important concepts). | T Tinker, or Try again |
| R Review, revise, repeat | |

F = FRAME YOUR QUESTION

1. Put Your Question into Words

State your question. The question you ask determines the answers you will find.

2. Identify Question Qualities

<i>Question Type</i>	Simple	Complex
<i>Question Topic</i>	Common	Rare Technical
<i>Question Class</i>	Etiology	Diagnosis Therapy Prognosis

3. Classify Questions

<i>Etiology/Causation</i>	Why/Who/When
<i>Diagnosis</i>	What/Where
<i>Therapy/Prevention/Causation/Harm</i>	What to Do/What Not to Do
<i>Prognosis/Outcome</i>	What Next/What to Expect

R = RELEVANCE

I = IRRELEVANCE

4. Select Key Concepts

	Are your concepts: Relevant? Searchable? Irrelevant? Answerable?
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5. Rank Key Concepts by Importance

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	Most questions have two to four important concepts, of which one is most important. Find that one most important concept before you start your search, and put it first when you search.
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A = ALTERNATES

6. Find Other Terms for Most Important Concepts

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a thesaurus. • The more technical or medical the term, the more technical results will be. • Be sure to check spelling and definitions of the most important concepts and terms.
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R = REVIEW, REVISE, REPEAT

S = SELECT A SEARCH ENGINE (#7)

If the question is <i>simple and common</i>then browse a major general health resource, or search in a health-specific search engine.
If the question is <i>complex and common</i>then search two to three of the concepts as single words or phrases in a moderate to large general search engine. If this doesn't work, then vary the terms for the concepts.
If the question is <i>simple and rare or technical</i>then use a two-part strategy. First, search the most specific or technical term in a large general search engine. Second, locate a specialized source on the topic, then repeat the search within the topic resource.
If the question is <i>complex and rare or technical</i>then use a three-part strategy. Attempt both parts of the strategy for a rare/technical question of the simple type. Also search for an expert with whom you may need to consult.

S = SEARCH

8. Remember These General Search Tips

- Use phrase searching (i.e., quotation marks).
- To say a word must be included, prefix it with a plus sign (+).
- To get rid of a word in the search results, do the search again, including that word prefixed by a minus sign (-).

9. Follow Sound Search Strategies

<i>Always</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific, be accurate. • Search by synonyms or aliases. • Search for related diseases or types of diseases.
<i>Usually</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spell out acronyms. • Search by phrase. • Search by most unique term.
<i>Rarely</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search by part of body affected. • Search by what's wrong.

10. Experiment If a Search Doesn't Work

- To refine a search, first change terms, not the search engine.
- Use more specific terms if search retrieved too much.
- Choose different terms if the information retrieved is off topic).
- Try more general terms if search retrieved too little.
- Change search engines if a few tries of new terms still does not work.

11. Don't Give Up If the Site You Want Is Gone

- Use the cache option in Google.
- Backtrack up the hierarchy of directory levels.
- Use the search engine at the main level of the Web site.
- Use a general search engine to locate the page's title, publisher, or organization.
- Try searching in the Internet Archive:
<<http://www.archive.org/>>.

E = EVALUATE (#12)

<i>Candor</i>	They tell you the whole truth.
<i>Honesty</i>	They tell you nothing but the truth.
<i>Quality</i>	The information is accurate, up to date, and easy to understand.
<i>Informed consent</i>	They do not keep information about you without your permission.
<i>Privacy</i>	They protect any information you allow them to keep.
<i>Professionalism</i>	They tell you their limitations and ethical responsibilities.
<i>Responsible partnering</i>	They disclose influences and sources of information or funding; they choose all of these to foster trust.
<i>Accountability</i>	They say who they are, why they do this, and how to reach them.

C =CITE WHAT WAS FOUND

13. Discuss the Findings with Your Doctor

1. This is the information I found.
2. This is why I believe this to be a credible source of information.
 - OR: I would appreciate your judgment of this information.
 - OR: I have concerns about the quality of this information, and would appreciate a suggestion of a better source.
3. This information raised these questions or concerns. I would appreciate discussing them with you.
 - OR: Would you please recommend information to answer these questions or concerns?

T =TINKER OR TRY AGAIN

14. Know When to Stop

- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
- If at first you do succeed, try at least once more to see you find something better. Shop around. Second opinions count with health information, too.
- If you try and try again, and still don't succeed, decide how important this is for you, and then ask for help, take a break and try again later, or simply stop.

Note: The FRIAR/SECT chart is a consensus version of some of the searching strategies in volume 1.