

# An In-depth Look at MedlinePlus

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## Advanced Searching

### MedlinePlus.gov Search Tips

[nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/searchtips.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/searchtips.html)

#### 1. How Do I Search MedlinePlus? (medlineplus.gov)

The search box appears at the top of every MedlinePlus page.

To search MedlinePlus, type a word or phrase into the search box. Click the “Search MedlinePlus” button or press the “Enter” button on your keyboard. The results page shows your first 10 matches. If your search yields more than 10 results, click on “Next” or page number links on the bottom of the page to view more.

The default display for MedlinePlus searches is a comprehensive list of “All Results.” Users can focus their search on one part of the site by navigating to an individual collection of results.

#### 2. What Do the Links in the “Collections” Box Under “All Results” Mean?

Your initial search results show matches from all of the MedlinePlus content areas. The links in the “Collections” box under “All Results” represent sets of MedlinePlus content areas, known as collections. The collections help you narrow your search by displaying results exclusively from one collection. For example, you can limit your search results to the latest news by clicking the News link in the “Collections” box.

MedlinePlus has six collections:

The **Health Topics** collection contains MedlinePlus Health Topic pages.

The **External Health Links** collection contains links to webpages from selected government agencies and health-related organizations. These links may include Interactive Tutorials, videos, easy-to-read materials and NIH publications. They appear on MedlinePlus Health Topic pages but they're listed individually in the search results.

The **Drugs and Supplements** collection contains prescription and over-the-counter medication information and information on herbs and supplements.

The **Medical Encyclopedia** collection contains articles and images on hundreds of diseases and conditions.

The **News** collection contains news articles and recent press announcements from major medical organizations.

The **Other Resources** collection contains links to organizations, directories, and databases from MedlinePlus. This collection also contains featured content, such as the NIH MedlinePlus Magazine and MedlinePlus FAQs.

### 3. Can I Search for a Phrase?

Yes, you can search for a phrase by enclosing words in quotation marks. For example, "health services research" retrieves pages containing that phrase.

### 4. Will the Search Automatically Expand My Search Words to Include Synonyms?

Yes, a built-in thesaurus automatically expands your search. The thesaurus contains a list of synonyms from NLM's MeSH® (Medical Subject Headings) and other sources. When there is a match between a search term and a word in the thesaurus, the thesaurus automatically adds the synonym(s) to your search. For example, if you search for the word "swelling," results are automatically retrieved for "edema."

### 5. Is Boolean Searching Allowed? What About Wildcards?

Yes, you can use the following operators: OR, NOT, -, +, \*

You do not need to use AND because the search engine automatically finds resources containing all of your search terms.

<b>OR</b>	Use when you want either term, but not necessarily both, to appear in the results Example: <i>Tylenol OR Acetaminophen</i>
<b>NOT or -</b>	Use when you do not want a particular term to appear in the results Examples: <i>flu NOT bird</i> or <i>flu -bird</i>
<b>+</b>	Use when you want the word to appear in your search results exactly as you typed it Example: <i>+mammogram</i> finds resources containing that exact word; it does not find resources that contain the words mammography or mammoplasty.
<b>*</b>	Use as a wildcard when you want the search engine to fill in the blank for you; you must enter at least three letters Example: <i>mammo*</i> finds mammogram, mammography, etc.

### 6. Can I Restrict My Search to a Specific Website?

Yes, you can restrict your search to a specific site by adding "site:" and the domain or URL to your search words. For example, if you want to find breast cancer information in MedlinePlus only from the National Cancer Institute, search on "breast cancer site:cancer.gov."

### 7. Is the Search Case Sensitive?

The search engine is not case sensitive. The search engine matches words and concepts regardless of capitalization. For example, a search on "alzheimer's disease" also retrieves pages containing the words "Alzheimer's Disease."

## **8. What About Searching for Special Characters Like Ñ?**

You can use special characters in your search but they're not required. When you use diacritics in your search, the search engine retrieves pages that contain those diacritics. The search engine also retrieves pages that contain the term without special characters. For example, if you search on the word "niño," your results include pages that contain the word "ñiño" or "nino."

## **9. Will the Search Check My Spelling?**

Yes, the search engine suggests replacements when it doesn't recognize your search term.

## **10. Why Didn't My Search Find Anything? What Should I Do?**

Your search didn't find anything because you spelled a word incorrectly or because the information you're looking for isn't available in MedlinePlus.

If you spelled a word wrong, the search engine consults the thesaurus for a possible match and makes suggestions. If the search engine doesn't give you suggestions, consult a dictionary for the correct spelling. You can try the medical dictionary on MedlinePlus.

If the information you're looking for isn't available on MedlinePlus, you can try searching other resources from the National Library of Medicine. For example, you can search MEDLINE/PubMed, NLM's database of biomedical journal literature. ([pubmed.gov](http://pubmed.gov))

## Sample Scenarios

### Scenario 1

- A woman comes to reference desk and says, “I have emphysema, and my doctor told me I need to quit smoking. I’ve tried on my own, but I keep starting up again. Do you have anything to help people quit smoking?”

### Scenario 2

- A Spanish-speaking patron approaches the librarian and asks a question in Spanish. The librarian doesn’t understand. The patron shows a piece of paper that looks like a prescription from a doctor’s office. The drug is miglitol. How can the librarian help this user?

### Scenario 3

- A young man comes to the reference desk. He asks for information about foods that are good for people with diabetes and general information about the disease. He wants something he can show on the computer at his home to his parents who both have the disease. They both speak English as a second language, so they need information that is easy to understand.

### Scenario 4

- A library user is looking for organizations devoted to research about Lou Gehrig’s disease. He found out about the ALS Association on the MedlinePlus health topic page, but would like to find more organizations if they exist.

### Scenario 5

- A teenage girl approaches and says, “The doctor says my dad has this problem where he can’t swallow. It could be a sign of Parkinson’s disease – is that true? I think he called it “dysphasia.”

## Sample Scenarios – Suggested Answers Using MedlinePlus

### Scenario 1

- Library user needs information to help her quit smoking.

Search for “smoking” and look at the Health Topics listings. Choose the topic “Smoking Cessation.” Other ways to search include the keyword search for “quitting smoking,” using the Related Topics list on the Smoking Health Topics page, and scrolling through the “S” Health Topics using the A-Z list.

### Scenario 2

- A Spanish-speaking patron needs information about the drug “miglitol.”

Go to Drugs and Supplements, search for “miglitol” in the A-Z list, and click on the record. When the page appears, click on the “español” button to bring up the page in Spanish.

### Scenario 3

- A young man needs information about diabetes that is easy to understand.

In this case, show the young man the diabetes Health Topics pages. (There are several, including Diabetic Diet.) The Diabetes page has a link to the Interactive Tutorial on this topic, which would be appropriate for the parents, and several articles are designated as “easy-to-read.”

### Scenario 4

- A library user needs information about organizations focused on Lou Gehrig’s disease in addition to ones listed on the MedlinePlus Health Topic page.

Go to the Other Resources section, and click on Databases. Click on the DIRLINE link. Try your search using several variations – Lou Gehrig, Lou Gehrig’s disease, ALS – and take note of the different search results. (You may have noticed the Organizations links on the Other Resources page. These are the same listings that would be found on the Health Topics pages, so we need to broaden the search in this particular case.)

### Scenario 5

- A teenager asks about a condition that she thinks is spelled “dysphasia.”

Hint: Check term as it is provided to you in the medical dictionary. Similar-sounding medical terms can be problematic.

- a. *dysphagia*, n., difficulty in swallowing..
- b. *dysphasia*, n., impairment or loss of the power to use or understand speech; caused by disease of, or injury to the brain (such as in a stroke).

Now perform a search for the proper term “dysphagia + parkinsons,” click on Health Topics in the Collections box, and you will find the Health Topic page Swallowing Disorders. You can also perform searches for either of the topics for more information.