Overview: When should I use this database?

- The main focus of The Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL Plus) is nursing, along with biomedicine, health sciences librarianship, alternative/complementary medicine, consumer health and 17 allied health disciplines. In total, the EBSCO-hosted database contains nearly 4 million records, indexed from over 3,100 journals dating back to the 1930s. Note: this tipsheet applies to the Ebsco version of this database.

Before you start searching, keep in mind . . .

Prepare to save your search in a document, the database, and/or a citation management software (EndNote, Refworks, etc.)

- By saving your search, your strategy will be reproducible for another time and properly documented.
- Explore options for citation management here, and find tips on how to export results.
- To save searches in CINAHL Plus create an Ebsco account by clicking on the “Sign In” link in the upper-right corner of the screen. Then, click on “Search History” underneath the search boxes and “Save searches/Alerts.”
- Create an alert within CINAHL Plus to receive updates on a topic. Follow the same steps for saving a search, but choose "Alert" instead.

Keywords

How to Find & Use

- Keyword terms can be single words or phrases.
- Use quotes around all phrases to ensure that the phrase is searched instead of each word individually. (e.g. “public health”)
- Consult CINAHL's thesaurus for ideas of additional terms to add to your search. You can access the thesaurus by clicking on the "CINAHL Headings" link on the top of the screen.
- To find additional ideas and/or synonyms, consult controlled vocabularies in other subject databases. For example, Embase has a controlled vocabulary called Emtree. Emtree records contain synonym lists similar to the "entry terms" listed beneath a heading in a MeSH record. The Emtree synonym list often contains European spellings/variations.
CINAHL Plus Search Tips

Controlled Vocabularies — How to Find & Use

Locate Controlled Vocabulary (CINAHL® Subject Headings)

- CINAHL Plus has a thesaurus that you can use to access its controlled vocabulary. These are a standardized set of terms that are used to bring consistency to the searching process. To access the thesaurus, click on the "CINAHL Headings" link on the top of the homepage.

- When searching for controlled vocabulary in the thesaurus use scope notes. These are found to the right of each term and provide a definition of the term.

- Databases predating CINAHL Plus do not yet have subject headings assigned, so if you are searching for articles published between 1937 and 1961, you’ll want to use keywords.

- Terms are arranged hierarchically by subject categories with more specific terms arranged beneath broader terms.

Subheadings

- Use subheadings such as "adverse effects" or "therapeutic use" to focus your search. You can access them once you click on a controlled vocabulary term in the thesaurus. Warning: applying too many subheadings leads to missing important articles on the topic.

- See next page for more information on applying field tags, and visit CINAHL’s Subject Headings info page to learn more.

Combining Searches Using Boolean Operators

- A comprehensive and systematic search of CINAHL includes both controlled vocabulary and keyword terms (i.e. free text, natural language, and synonyms).

- Boolean operators are used to combine search terms. In CINAHL, you can use the operators AND, OR, and NOT.

- Boolean operators MUST be used as upper case (AND, OR, NOT).
  
  - **OR**—use OR between similar keywords, like synonyms, acronyms, and variations in spelling within the same idea or concept
  
  - **AND**—use AND to link ideas and concepts where you want to see both ideas or concepts in your search results
  
  - **NOT**—used to exclude specific keywords from the search, however, you will want to use NOT with caution because you may end up missing something important.

- Go to the “Advanced Search” page to combine searches (in CINAHL this is typically the default homepage). Your search history will be located above your results during your search session, and can be viewed by clicking the “Search History” beneath the search boxes.
Applying Filters

- On the left side of the screen, you will see an option to "Refine Results" with options for Source Types, Publication, Subject Headings, Language, Age, Gender, etc. To access the complete list of options for limits, click on the “Advanced Search” link beneath the search boxes at the top of the page.

- Warning: filters such as species, ages, text availability, and subject discipline may unnecessarily exclude articles you want to see. When you apply these filters, you are using controlled vocabulary or database indexing to exclude articles. This is not always a reliable method of excluding articles.

Field Tags

You can use field tags to specify where the database looks for the search term. In CINAHL Plus, first type the field tag and then the search term. e.g. TI Cardiology looks for cardiology in the title

- TI — Searches the Title field
- AB — Searches the Abstract field
- AB OR TI — Searches the Abstract field and the Title Field at the same time
- AU — Searches the Author field
- AF — Searches the Author Affiliation field (organization or university the researcher works for)
- SO — Searches the Publication field (field to enter names of journals)
- MH — Searches the exact CINAHL Plus subject heading, searching both major and minor headings
- MM — Searches the exact CINAHL Plus subject heading, searching only in major headings

Truncation & Wildcards

- In CINAHL Plus you can use a * at the root of a word to find multiple endings. For example:
  - arthroplast* will return arthroplasty, arthroplasties, arthroplastic, arthroplastics, etc.
  - mobili* will return mobility, mobilization, mobilisation, mobilize, etc.

- You can also use a ? as a wildcard to search for letter variants within a word (e.g. wom?n finds women and woman)

- In CINAHL Plus you can use truncation and phrase searching at the same time. e.g. "early childhood mobili*"
Proximity Searching

- CINAHL Plus allows for proximity searching through the use of two operators (N or W), along with a number to indicate the proximity of the words (up to 255 words).

- N operator: The N operator stands for "Near Operator." Typing N5 would find two words within 5 words of each other without considering the order in which the words are entered. (therapy N5 sleep) looks for the word “therapy” within 5 words of sleep.

- W operator: The W operator stands for "Within Operator." Typing W5 follows the order the words are typed. (therapy W5 sleep) would find the phrase “therapy for improved sleep,” but it would not find “sleep therapy”

Accessing Full Text

In CINAHL Plus, the FIND IT icon (above) will often appear within a citation. Clicking on the icon will take you to an external page that will show a listing of full-text options. If the full text is not available, you will see a heading that says, "Request a copy from Interlibrary Loan." Click on "Welch Medical Library Borrowers" link to request the article free of charge (only available for Hopkins students, faculty, and staff).

More Information

- General principles on searching in any database
- CINAHL Plus Subject Headings (more info)