



American Brain Tumor Association

SEARCHING MEDICAL JOURNALS

If you've exhausted patient and family information and wish more details on a particular medical subject, consider a "MedLine" search. Medline/PubMed is a computer program used to search the medical journals indexed by the National Library of Medicine. Once reserved only for medical staff, you can now perform a Medline search from your own computer without downloading any new software.

1. Using your Internet web browser, go to www.nlm.nih.gov. This is the homepage of the United States National Library of Medicine. Double click on the "PubMed" picture on the right-hand side of the page.

2. PubMed provides you with a small search engine box that performs a "Medline" search of medical literature. It will index medical journals looking for case reports, review articles, results of clinical trials, new treatment information, etc. It offers access to over 4300 medical journals – the journals physicians and scientists read to share information with each other. You can search the journals by keywords, author's last name, or journal name.

As this page loads, your cursor will automatically jump into the search box. Type your keywords into that box, then double click on the Go button.

A note about keywords:

Medline relies on a hierarchal list of terms called Mesh Terms. While medical librarians are savvy in using "proper" Mesh Terms to expedite their searches, it is quick and easy to do a search using your own keywords. Each search takes only a few seconds, so don't be afraid to try variations. At very worst, you don't find what you're looking for and you try a new set of keywords.

Determining keywords is similar to figuring out where the person who held your job prior to you filed or saved something. Try to clearly and succinctly describe the information you wish to find. For example, if you are looking for the results of clinical trials offered for children with brain stem glioma, use the keywords "brain stem glioma, clinical trials." If you are searching for new treatments for glioblastoma multiforme, try the keywords "glioblastoma, treatments." To find results of a phase II trial of a particular drug, use the generic name of the "drug, Phase II." Separate your keywords with a comma, then click Go.

3. Once you click, PubMed will return a list of articles containing your keywords. (Don't forget

that your keyword may appear in the text of the article, and not the title.) This list of articles – also called citations – are all the “possibilities” PubMed thought you might be looking for based on your keywords.

4. It’s now up to you to determine how close your keywords brought you. Many of the articles offer a summary, called an “abstract,” accessed by double clicking on the title of the article. If the article doesn’t meet your information needs, use your browser’s Back key to return to the list of articles. If most of the articles are off-base, change your keywords and try again.

5. When you find an article that addresses your question, return to the list of citations and look to the right of the article title for a PubMed feature called “Related Articles.” Double clicking that option tells PubMed to find other articles just like this article. It’s a very fast and effective way to find additional material on a focused subject.

6. By now you’ve noticed that PubMed is limited to providing abstracts of articles, not entire articles. However, if the material seems to be exactly what you’re searching for, you may be able to retrieve more than the PubMed abstract. Since this procedure will take you out of the National Library of Medicine site, be prepared just in case you lose your PubMed search. Jot down the keywords you used in this search so you can recreate it. Then make a note of the date/month/volume of the journal you are setting off in search of.

From your PubMed citations list, double click on the interesting article title. If the journal has an online site and the article is stored online, you’ll see a small block showing the journal’s web site address. It’s actually a hyperlink – double click on it. You’ll move to the publisher’s web site, and likely see a message that announces you need a subscription to retrieve the article. Don’t be put off! Look around that page for an “Archives” button, and double click.

From the Archives menu, choose the month/date/volume of the journal for which you are searching and double click. You’ll probably next see an index page listing the articles by name or grouping them by disease/topic. If you find the article by name, double click. If you need to search by topic, choose the section most likely to have brain tumor articles in it. That may mean the “central nervous system” section, “brain neoplasms,” “tumor” section, etc. If you accidentally end up in cardiac diseases, just use your Back button and try again! Once you find the article you’re looking for, double click.

Now you’re going to make some choices. Most publishers mark their online articles “Full Text,” “Abstract,” or “PDF.” The abstracts here are generally more extensive than the Medline/PubMed abstract, and may be exactly what you need. But if your interest is really piqued now and you want the entire article, look for the option of ordering a single copy. The cost of obtaining the copy is generally somewhere between \$5 - \$25. (Yes, quite steep, but remember the subscription price for some of these journals can be \$400-500 a year.) You can pay for the article online using a credit card, and have immediate access. Some sites include

access to the site for 24 hours, others provide only the one article, one-time. Read the agreement to learn what is included in the fee. If you have site access for awhile, you might find other articles on your subject.

Alternatively, you can ask the medical librarian at your hospital library to find the articles of interest, or perhaps the reference librarian at your local library can access the materials. Either source will need the name of the author(s), the title of the article, the name of the journal, and the volume/date/pages.

7. Once you have your articles or summaries in hand, don't be afraid to ask for help in understanding what they mean or their relevance to your situation. Take them to your next doctor's visit and ask for assistance in their translation. We also offer an extensive *Dictionary for Brain Tumor Patients* with over 124 pages of terms you may find in these reports. Please feel free to call us at 800-886-2282 and request a free copy.

We hope this information helps you better understand the options available to you, and the many information resources at your disposal. If we can be of any further assistance, please contact us.

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