

Cochrane Consumer Network



THE COCHRANE
COLLABORATION®

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CONSUMERS IN COCHRANE

REPRESENTING CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

The Cochrane Collaboration

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international organisation that aims to help people make well-informed decisions about health by preparing, maintaining and ensuring the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of healthcare interventions.

For consumers

Would you like to know how to find the best evidence in healthcare? This leaflet provides health care users with advice and practical assistance on how to make their voice heard.

Websites:

<http://consumers.cochrane.org>

<http://www.cochrane.org>

How can we tell if a treatment is any good?

To tell if a health care treatment works, we can compare it with other treatments used for the same health problem, or we can compare it to what happens if there is no treatment.

To do this, one group of people is given the new treatment and another group is given either the existing treatment or no treatment (known as a placebo). A placebo looks identical to the new treatment (for example, if it was a tablet, like a headache pill, it would be the same shape and colour) but the placebo contains no active ingredients. A placebo is used so that people don't know what treatment they are getting. This is important as there is a psychological aspect to health care and some people will feel better (or worse) simply because they are taking a tablet.

Why don't all doctors use research?

Some people are surprised to hear that many healthcare decisions are made without the latest research evidence. They imagine that doctors, who study both at university and in hospitals for many years, must be experts in health and medicine. But doctors face a serious challenge because research is published every day, all over the world. New studies

appear in thousands of medical, scientific and health-related journals worldwide. The results of one study are sometimes different, or even contradict, the results of others. Another problem is that many of the journals are written in another language. And no matter how tempting, it would be wrong to ignore these reports just because it was written in a language they do not understand!

The Cochrane Solution

The Cochrane Collaboration combines all studies on a topic, e.g. a particular health condition, into a single research document known as a 'Cochrane Review.'

A **Cochrane Review** is a systematic, up-to-date summary of reliable evidence of the benefits and risks of healthcare. Cochrane Reviews are intended to help people make practical decisions. For a review to be called a 'Cochrane Review' it must be prepared and maintained by The Cochrane Collaboration. Authors of Cochrane Reviews are expected to adhere to guidelines published in the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*. The specific methods used in a Review are described in the text of the review. Cochrane Reviews are published in The Cochrane Library.

About *The Cochrane Library*

The Cochrane Library is a collection of databases, published on the Internet and DVD and updated monthly. Readers are invited to comment on reviews to help authors improve them, even after they are published.

The Cochrane Library is a subscription-based product of The Cochrane Collaboration. It brings together all the currently available Cochrane Reviews and is updated monthly. Cochrane Review Groups submit edited reviews and plain language summaries.

Plain Language Summaries are synopses of Cochrane Reviews written in layman's terms.

Where can consumers access *The Cochrane Library*?

Plain language summaries and abstracts appear free of charge at <http://summaries.cochrane.org>

The full *Cochrane Library* is available by subscription and in most medical libraries. It may also be available in some public libraries so ask your local librarian.

A guide on how to use the Cochrane Library can be found at www.cochrane.org.au/libraryguide/

Currently, people living in Finland, Norway, Ireland, Denmark, the UK and Australia access to The Cochrane Library free of charge thanks to agreements with national governments. A full list of countries with free access is available online at <http://www.thecochranelibrary.com/view/0/FreeAccess.html>

Different groups for different health conditions

The *Cochrane Collaboration* comprises a number of groups, organised according to topic. So, for example, there is a Cochrane Epilepsy group and a Pregnancy and Childbirth group.

Each "**Review Group**" has many members with a variety of backgrounds, experience and expertise. Members are doctors, nurses, researchers, health advisers and, of course, consumers. The activities of each review group are co-ordinated by one person, known as the *Managing Editor (ME)*.

Take the time to find the Review Group that covers the health condition of most interest to you. A full list of review groups can be found on the Collaboration's website <http://www.cochrane.org/contact/view-groups>

How can I get involved?

If you would like to find out more about becoming involved, join the Cochrane Consumer Network at <http://consumers.cochrane.org>.

Cochrane Consumer Learning

For more information on evidence, The Cochrane Collaboration, or using The Cochrane Library, visit <http://consumers.cochrane.org/cochrane-consumer-learning>

For Further Information

You can learn more in The Cochrane Collaboration's **Newcomer Guide** at <http://www.cochrane.org/about-us/newcomers-guide>

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