Cochrane Bone, Joint & Muscle Trauma Group
New Authors’ Guide

Thinking of doing a Cochrane Review?

The Cochrane Bone, Joint and Muscle Trauma Group (CBJMTG) is a collaborative review group of the Cochrane Collaboration, an organisation committed to informing health care practice through the production of systematic reviews. Like most Cochrane Review Groups, we focus on a specific clinical area. In our case it is fractures and injuries to the musculoskeletal system.

The Cochrane Collaboration’s website (http://www.cochrane.org) is an excellent place to begin to see what the Collaboration is all about. The Newcomers’ Guide, for example, may be particularly helpful and can be found at http://www.cochrane.org/docs/newcomersguide.htm. The Cochrane Collaboration’s website has lots of information and includes abstracts of Cochrane reviews (the full reviews are available on The Cochrane Library, found in most medical libraries and also available by CD-ROM on subscription).

The Group’s aim is that all reviews undertaken for the Group will be published in The Cochrane Library in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Review (CDSR). The Cochrane Library is the main ‘product’ of the Cochrane Collaboration. It contains all the protocols and reviews produced by the different Collaborative Review Groups (CRGs), in addition to a number of useful related databases. For more information about The Cochrane Library, contact Joanne Elliott at the editorial base.

Also available in The Cochrane Library is more detailed information on the Group than can be included here. It can be found under ‘About Cochrane’, then ‘Cochrane Review Groups’, then ‘Cochrane Bone, Joint and Muscle Trauma Group’.

Expressing an interest in conducting a Cochrane Review

If you think you may be interested in undertaking a review for CBJMTG, the first thing to do is approach the editorial base in Manchester, UK. Enquiries about the CBJMTG review process are welcome and will not be interpreted as a commitment to undertake a review!

The Managing Editor, currently Lindsey Elstub, will provide you with introductory information about the Group on request. This includes details of the editorial team members, group methods, its scope and reviews currently being developed.

As a potential reviewer (now referred to as ‘author’) you should be aware that undertaking a systematic review is a significant commitment and you should feel happy that you have the resources to follow it through. Also, a Cochrane Review is never ‘finished’ and will need to be updated on a regular basis, so taking on a review is potentially a long-term commitment.

For quality assurance purposes, the review process requires at least two authors to be involved in most cases. If you have not identified any potential co-authors, we may be able to put you in touch with people who would be interested in working with you.

If you discover that other authors are already addressing your idea for a review, you may be able to collaborate on the same topic. Alternatively, you may choose to develop another idea for a review, or undertake a review in an area where there are known to be trials but as yet no author.

Once you think you would like to undertake a review, please notify Lindsey Elstub at the editorial base (e-mail is the most convenient method of communication from the editorial base’s point of view, but any way is acceptable). You will be asked to submit a title.
Proposed titles will be discussed with the Co-ordinating Editor and if appropriate, other members of the editorial team. If someone else has not already registered your idea, and if the Co-ordinating Editor agrees that it is in the Group’s scope, your title will be accepted. We may work with you first to refine the scope of your proposed review.

The title should be based on a focused, clearly framed research question for the proposed review. Before registering a new title please put some effort into finding a title that fits one of these three standard formats:

- **<Intervention> for <Health problem>**
  - e.g. Exercise therapy for patellofemoral pain syndrome

- **<Intervention A> versus <Intervention B> for <Health problem>**
  - e.g. Condyllocephalic nails versus extramedullary implants for extracapsular hip fractures

- **<Intervention> for <Health problem> in <Participant group/location>**
  - e.g. Interventions for preventing falls in elderly people

Once a title is agreed by the Group, it is formally registered on the central management system used by the Collaboration. Other Groups are notified of new titles each week. The editorial team aim to approve titles within four weeks of submission.

Please ensure that you have provided full contact details for yourself and your co-authors, including: names, job titles, postal addresses, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses and brief descriptions of your professional interests.

Formal submission of the title is taken as your agreement to proceed to undertake a full Cochrane systematic review. Therefore, you should only submit the title formally if this is your intention. We, in turn, shall discourage other potential authors from working on this topic, other than with you.

Initially, titles are only listed in the section of The Cochrane Library which describes the activities of this Group. Later, however, titles are listed within the main Database of Systematic Reviews once the protocols (or full reviews) have been written.

Joanne Elliott, the Trials Search Co-ordinator for the Group, will conduct a quick search at this point to obtain some indication of the trials which may be available. She is available to help authors develop a search strategy for their protocol which is comprehensive and replicable. However, the responsibility for the search lies with the author and searches by the editorial base of the Group’s specialist register should be seen as complementing rather than making up the search yield at this stage.

Before commencing the review process, it is important that you read the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (Version 5.0.2, September 2009 or later). This describes the methods and layout of a Cochrane Review: all reviews must conform to the specifications described in the Handbook. The Handbook is available from [http://www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/](http://www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/).

Once your title has been registered, you and your co-authors will be asked to complete a Declaration of Interest questionnaire. The Cochrane Collaboration’s general policy states “The performance of the review must be free of any real or perceived bias introduced by receipt of any benefit in cash or kind, any hospitality, or any subsidy derived from any source that may have or be perceived to have an interest in the outcome of the review.”
Developing A Protocol

Protocols expand on the title to describe the review methods. You should use the Cochrane Handbook and advice from the editorial base to guide the development of your protocol.

The Cochrane Collaboration uses specific software called Review Manager (RevMan) to develop protocols and reviews. While you can work on your protocol in a Word document, it is preferable that you use RevMan from the start, so you can become familiar with it. Instructions for downloading RevMan are available at http://www.cc-ims.net/RevMan. The first time you open RevMan you will be asked to enter your contact ID, which you will need to get from Lindsey Elstub at the editorial base. A RevMan User’s Guide is downloaded along with the software, and there is an extensive Help menu which you should refer to frequently.

The Collaboration maintains a Style Guide which has been developed to provide a consistent style in protocols and reviews. It is available from http://www.cochrane.org/style/home.htm and there is an active link to it in the Help menu of RevMan. Please refer to this when writing your protocol.

All countries have been assigned a reference Cochrane Centre which is likely to be the centre nearest geographically, but not necessarily so. Many Cochrane Centres provide regular training workshops and these are listed on the Cochrane web page at http://www.cochrane.org/news/workshops.shtml. You will almost certainly find it useful to attend one of these. Either contact your reference Cochrane Centre directly or ask the Managing Editor for further details.

As a rough guide, your protocol will need to address the following issues:

- The specific purpose of the review (question to be addressed)
- The reasons why the question is being addressed (background)
- The types of people (participants) to be studied
- The types of interventions to be considered or compared
- The types of outcomes to be included
- The types of study design that will be accepted (normally RCTs)
- The sources and search methods used to find the primary studies
- Methods of avoiding bias in the selection of articles
- Appropriate criteria for assessing the quality of the studies
- Planned methods (whether qualitative or quantitative) for combining the finds

When you have developed your protocol to your own satisfaction, it should be submitted ‘formally’ to the Group. This means it will go through the Group’s refereeing process prior to inclusion in The Cochrane Library.

To submit your protocol formally, you should send a copy of the review to the Managing Editor electronically as a RevMan file.

Before you submit …

- Please ensure that all contact details for yourself and your co-authors are up to date
- Please make all the necessary checks to the document before sending to the editorial base (see appendices)

What happens next?

Once you have submitted your protocol formally to the Group, it will be subject to the CBJMTG refereeing process.

The Managing Editor may check a few points with you, as will the Trials Search Co-ordinator after looking at your search strategy. Your protocol will then be distributed to at least three members of the editorial Group. The Group aims to give editorial feedback to you within four weeks of submission. This usually takes the form of a Word document, which is a compilation of the editors’ comments.
You now respond to the editors’ comments in the spaces provided in the feedback form. You may agree with the suggestion and have changed your protocol accordingly. Alternatively, you may not agree with the suggestion, in which case you should give an explanation of why you have not changed the protocol in accordance with the suggestion.

Once your revised protocol and responses are received at the editorial base, the protocol will go out to an external referee for comment. When those comments have been dealt with, as above the revised protocol and your responses will go to the Co-ordinating Editor, who looks at the revisions, and if he/she is satisfied that comments have been given full consideration, gives his/her final approval for the protocol to be submitted to The Cochrane Library.

NB if you are aiming to get your protocol into a specific edition of The Cochrane Library, you will need to send the final version to the Managing Editor by a cut-off date agreed in advance with her. This will mean allowing time for the refereeing process.

NB The Cochrane Library is published on the internet and on DVD-ROM four times a year, and is available by subscription. Many countries have a national subscription which provides free access to everyone in that country. Each issue is published approximately eight weeks after the submission deadline. Ask your editorial base about submission deadlines for each issue.

Developing your review

Before embarking on your review it is important that at least one of the authors is familiar with the statistical methods recommended in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (version 5.2). As your protocol describes your review methods it will guide you in developing your review. Once again, use the Handbook and involve the editorial base in this process.

After your protocol has been submitted to the Library, you will also be sent details of relevant studies from our register of trials which is developed through extensive electronic searching.

Broadly speaking, the steps in completing a review are as follows
- Locating the studies (the citations received from the Group’s Register should be seen as complementing your search. Your search should include checking the reference lists of known trials or contacting experts in the field or authors of known trials. The Trials Search Co-ordinator at the editorial base will give you advice.)
- Selecting relevant studies (using pre-agreed criteria)
- Assessing the risk of bias of included studies should be done using the Collaboration’s Risk of Bias (RoB) tool. Details of this tool can be found in Chapter 8 of the Handbook and the tool itself in Table 8.5a. The use of alternative tools must be approved in advance by the Group's editors
- Describing the characteristics of included studies (participants, interventions, outcomes)
- Collecting (extracting) data from the primary studies included. A sample data extraction form is available on the Group’s website and can be adapted for use in your review.
- Analysing and presenting results
- Interpreting the results (Discussions and Conclusions)

The editorial office will be able to provide details for the support and resources you can expect from the Group for developing the review.

When you have completed your review to your own satisfaction, (the review MUST be commented on by all co-authors) it should be submitted formally to the editorial base by sending it to the Managing Editor. It will then enter the refereeing process, en route to inclusion in The Cochrane Library.
What happens next?

The draft review is considered by a minimum of three CBJMTG editors. The Managing Editor summarises their comments and sends these to you. The target turnaround time is six weeks between receipt of the review and return of editorial comments. Again, you revise your review in light of comments, and give a report of which comments you have taken on board and which you have decided to leave, and why. Upon receiving the second draft of the review, it is then sent out to at least one external referee. Comments are received, sent on to you, any revisions made and the completed review sent back to the Group for final approval by the Co-ordinating Editor. Following receipt of the final draft of their review, authors may be contacted to discuss any substantial suggested changes before final approval by the Co-ordinating Editor and submission to The Cochrane Library.

Once approved, your review will be submitted for inclusion in The Cochrane Library. You and your co-authors will be asked to sign a Licence for Publication form, which outlines copyright and conflict of interest conditions. As a published contact author you will receive a complementary subscription to The Cochrane Library, as long as your review is kept up to date.

Before you submit …

- Please ensure that all contact details for yourself and your co-authors are up to date
- Please make all the necessary checks to the document before sending to the editorial base (see appendices)

Updating

And you thought you had finished! The Cochrane Collaboration aims to have the reviews on The Cochrane Library updated every two years. Therefore, it is the authors’ responsibility to redo their search on an annual basis in order to see if information on more trials has been published. The editorial base will help with this.

Please feel free to contact the Managing Editor at any time regarding any matter to do with your review.

Thanks for your interest and good luck!

Contact Us

Lindsey Elstub
Managing Editor
Cochrane Bone, Joint and Muscle Trauma Group
School of Epidemiology and Health Sciences
Medical School, 2nd Floor Stopford Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PT
UK

Tel: +44 161 2755953 Fax: +44 161 2755043 Email: lindsey.elstub@manchester.ac.uk

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Appendix I: Final Checks

It is very important to make the following checks, before your protocol or review is formally submitted to the editorial base. As the flow of protocols and reviews to the editorial base increases, your document may have to be returned to you if these checks have not been carried out.

- Run ‘Validation Report’ which is under File and then Reports in the drop down menu. This will identify errors such as missing fields in references, Contributions of authors section not completed etc.
- Ensure you have provided the names and full and up-to-date contact details for yourself and all your co-authors. This includes address, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address.
- Ensure that you have completed the ‘Contributions of authors’ section
- Ensure that you have provided ‘sources of support’ details for every author, as these will be published in The Cochrane Library.
- Divide the sources of support into intramural (i.e. employers, host institutions) and extramural (e.g. grant awarding bodies)
- Summarise each funding source in no more than 80 characters, including the host country e.g. “Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Office Department of Health, UK’ or ‘National Institute of Public Health, Norway’.
- Ensure you have run the spell checker in the text of the protocol/review and all the tables. Unlike Word the spell checker does not return to the top of the document so check that your cursor is at the start of the text before running the spell checker (Spell Check is under Tools in the drop down menu).
- Check all your references carefully. Make sure citations and references are in the correct format according to the Cochrane Style Guide.
- Remember to check that your protocol/review complies with the Style Guide recommendations (link to Style Guide under RevMan Help).
- If you are submitting a protocol, remember to include a target date for completion of the review on the cover sheet. A protocol should be converted into a review within a year. If you are submitting a review, enter a date when it will be updated so that users will know when to read the review again. Reviews should be updated within two years.