

Diagnostic Tests Toolkit

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Edited by Carl Heneghan, Rafael Perera and Douglas Badenoch



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Introduction

This 'Toolkit' is designed as a summary and reminder of the key elements of practising evidence-based medicine (EBM), focusing on diagnostic studies and research questions. It has largely been adapted from resources developed at the Centre for Evidence-based Medicine. For more detailed coverage, you should refer to the further reading and references that we cite throughout.

The first page of each chapter presents a 'minimalist' checklist of the key points. Further sections within each chapter address these points in more detail and give additional background information. Ideally, you should just need to refer to the first page to get the basics, and delve into the further sections as required.

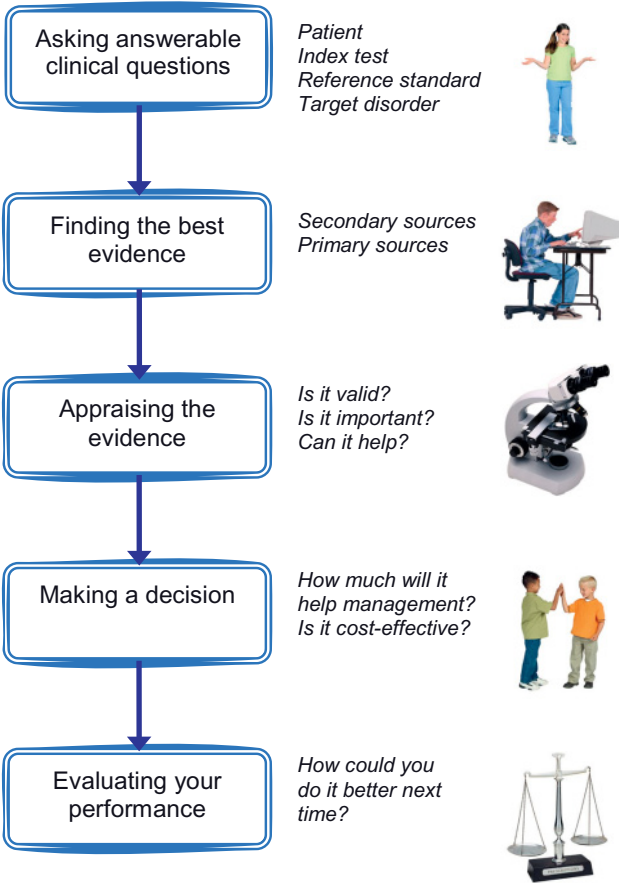
Definition of evidence-based medicine

Evidence-based medicine is the 'conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about individual patients'.

This means 'integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research and the patient's values and preferences' (Sackett et al. 1996).

We can summarize the EBM approach as a five-step model:

1. Asking answerable clinical questions.
2. Searching for the evidence.
3. Critically appraising the evidence for its validity and relevance.
4. Making a decision, by integrating the evidence with your clinical expertise and the patient's values.
5. Evaluating your performance.



Reference

Sackett DL, Rosenberg WMC, Gray JAM, et al. Evidence based medicine: what it is and what it isn't. *BMJ* 1996;**312**:71–2.