

Eligibility for Meta-analysis

Is a Meta-analysis Possible?

Take note of the study type. If all of the study types are retrospective or case studies, a meta-analysis may not be possible. Likewise, if you find that a lot of your studies involve only a small number of participants (e.g., fewer than 10), a meta-analysis may not be possible.

It is important to assess whether there are differences in study and patient characteristics across comparisons that affect the summary measures of treatment effects (odds ratio or hazard ratio) for the interventions of interest relative to an overall reference treatment. The decision to perform a meta-analysis should be based primarily on clinical judgment of whether differences among studies may affect the comparisons of treatments or make some comparisons inappropriate.

You should be aware of the overall expected study size so that the meta-analysis is not excessively large or excessively small. Always seek input from a statistician on this matter, as an “appropriate size” for an SR/MA is highly variable and depends on the specific study design and client requests. Generally speaking, you might expect a meta-analysis with inferential statistics to include anywhere from 4 to 50 studies



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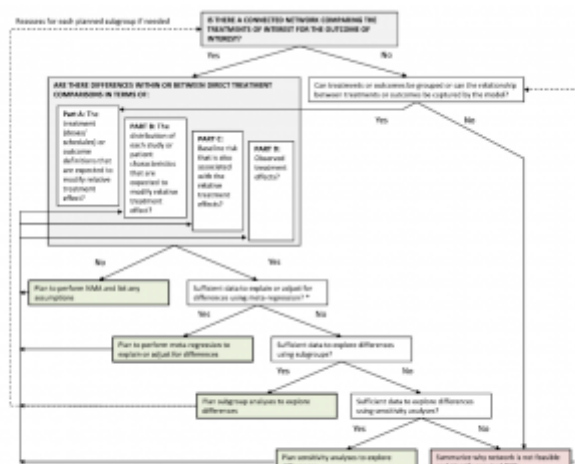


Figure 1 Overview of process to assess the feasibility of performing a valid network meta-analysis. *Planned meta-regressions in previous steps should be considered when assessing whether there is sufficient data for a meta-regression. It may be possible to perform separate meta-regressions per potential treatment effect modifier, although this should be clearly stated as a limitation.

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