

# Making Sense of Medical Research: A Guide to Different Study Types



HOSPITAL FOR SPECIAL SURGERY

## Why It Matters:

Different studies provide different levels of evidence. Knowing the difference helps you understand how surgeons evaluate treatment options.

### Original Research Study

Collects new data from patients to answer a specific question. These studies follow patients over time and measure outcomes such as pain, function, or healing.

### Systematic Review

Summarizes and analyzes all high-quality research on one topic. Instead of studying new patients, it compares results from many studies to find overall patterns.

### Case Series / Case Report

Describes one patient (case report) or a small group (case series). Useful for rare conditions or new techniques, but does not prove cause and effect.

### Review Article

Summarizes what is already known about a topic. No new data is collected, but it organizes existing research for easier understanding.

### Consensus Statement / Expert Opinion

Created when experts review available evidence and agree on best practices. Helpful when research is still developing or when judgment is required.

### Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

Patients are randomly assigned to different treatments. Because the groups are chosen at random, this type of study best shows whether one treatment is better than another.

### Meta-Analysis

Statistical method that combines data from multiple studies. Increases total patient numbers and can provide stronger, more reliable answers.

### Surgical Technique / Technical Note

Explains how a specific surgery is performed, with step-by-step detail, photos, or videos. Focuses on how to perform the procedure, not patient outcomes.

### Editorial Commentary

Written by experts to explain the importance of a newly published study. Offers insight, context, and areas where more research is needed.

### Conference Abstract / Poster

Preliminary research presented at a medical meeting before full publication. Findings may change once final data is complete.