

Preventive Medicine THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

**Preventive Medicine  
Grant Writing Seminar Series  
Session 8**

**Data analysis strategies and how  
they can enhance the proposal**



Fridtjof Thomas, PhD  
Professor  
Division of Biostatistics, Department of Preventive Medicine  
College of Medicine  
The University of Tennessee Health Science Center

Dec 01, 2023 1

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**About the presenter**

- Professor at the Division of Biostatistics, Dept. of Preventive Medicine
- At UTHSC since 2007
- NIH HEAL Data Stewardship Group that specifically works with assuring that the nationwide hundreds of HEAL-projects comply to the NIH Policy for Data Management and Sharing that has taken effect Jan. 25, 2023. (HEAL = Helping to End Addiction Long-term Initiative; heal.nih.gov).
- Design and Analysis Committee of the EARLY trials (2010-2016 – “Early Adult Reduction of weight through Lifestyle intervention,” a collection of seven randomized clinical trials funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH))
- Member of the Biostatistics Collaborative Core at the Southeast Regional Center of the NIH-NHLBI-funded Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) study that has recruited over 160,000 women in over 40 clinical centers nationwide. (2010-2017)
- Grant review experience since 2012 from
  - Department of Defense’s Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (DoD CDMRP)
  - NIH Epidemiology of Chronic and Infectious Disease Study Section
  - NIH Neurological, Aging, and Musculoskeletal Epidemiology (NAME) Study Section
- 14+ years Associate Editor of *The Journal of Statistical Computation and Simulation* (JSCS; a Taylor & Francis print journal since 1972)

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**Network of collaboration (Elsevier Pure “Fingerprint” 10/09/2019)**



Research output network - organizational units	
Department of Preventive Medicine	277
Department of Medicine, Division of Nephrology	100
Department of Pediatrics	6
Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences	5
Department of Clinical Pharmacy - Memphis	4
Department of Clinical Pharmacy - Nashville	4
Neuroscience Institute	4
Department of Ophthalmology	4
Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiovascular Diseases	4
Department of Medicine, Division of General Internal Medicine	3
Department of Acute and Tertiary Care	3
Department of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention	2

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## Outline

- What makes or breaks a proposal?
- Outcomes, Missing Data, Surrogate endpoints, Adverse events
- Intend-to-treat analysis (ITT)
- Clustering/grouping of observations
- Pre-planned vs. ad hoc subgroup analyses
- Heterogeneity of treatment effects (HTE) with respect to sex/gender and race
- Data Management and Sharing plan (DMS)

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## What makes or breaks a proposal?

- Most importantly:
  - Are you using **sound science**?
  - What is your **innovation**?
- The analytical plan cannot save your proposal, but it will sink it in a hurry if not put together thoughtfully
- Reviewers need to find “objective reasons” why they don’t like a proposal: the fewer targets the analytical plan offers for that, the better
- Make sure that
  - reviewers easily find what they are looking for
  - the analytical plan is connected to your research question
  - measures (including time points) are consistent throughout
- It is difficult to get funded!
- It is not all that difficult to have a better proposal than most I have seen when reviewing grants – but that takes time and effort!

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## How strong will your derived evidence be?

### Levels of evidence

- 1a Systematic review of high quality RCTs with similar results and effect sizes for many different RCTs.
- 1b Individual high quality RCT with high precision (narrow confidence interval)
- 1c All or none
- 2a Systematic review of cohort studies with similar results and effect sizes.
- 2b Individual cohort study or low quality RCT (e.g., <80% follow-up)
- 2c “Outcomes Research” and ecological studies (based on average exposures etc. of populations of geographical or temporal units)
- 3a Systematic review of case-control studies
- 3b Individual case-control study
- 4 Case-series and poor quality cohort and case-control studies
- 5 Expert opinion (unless critically appraised or based on “first principles”)

Source: Oxford Centre for Evidence-based Medicine  
<https://www.cebm.net/2009/06/oxford-centre-evidence-based-medicine-levels-evidence-march-2009/>

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## All or none: Example “Bubble Boy” disease

- Babies born without functional immune system.
- SCID-X1: 1 in 50,000-100,000 affected; caused by a mutation in a gene (IL2RG)
- Most die within first year of life. (Only about 20% have access to a suitable sibling for a bone-marrow transplant as the existing cure.)

St. Jude announced April 18, 2019: Gene therapy cure for babies with X-linked severe combined immunodeficiency

“The gene therapy, produced in the Children’s GMP, LLC, manufacturing facility on the St. Jude campus, involved use of a virus to transport and insert a correct copy of a gene into the genome of patients’ blood stem cells. Following the treatment, the children began producing functioning immune cells for the first time, according to St. Jude, and most patients were discharged from the hospital within one month.” [All 8 babies started to produce complete sets of immune cells.]

<https://www.stjude.org/inspire/news/bubble-boy-scid-x1-cure.html>  
<https://www.stjude.org/research/news-publications/research-highlights/2019-research-highlights/st-jude-gene-therapy-holds-promise-for-treating-several-diseases.html>

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## Outcomes

- Outcomes: Be ambitious but realistic
  - pilot studies go a long way!
  - An R21 is not an underfunded R01
- Missing Data:
  - Missing covariate information vs. missing endpoints
  - 20% attrition in behavioral intervention studies might be acceptable, 10% is better – requires work to achieve!
  - Differential loss to follow-up needs to be addressed in the analytical plan
- Surrogate endpoints: e.g., progression free survival
- Adverse events:
  - Always occur and need to be reported/summarized (may or may not be related to the intervention)
  - How do adverse events impact on your outcome/collection of measures?

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## Missing Data

- Keep it to a minimum
- Mention the word “multiple imputation”, know what it means, and have a realistic approach to it
- Complete case analysis or “last observation carried forward” doesn’t cut it in most cases
- Include sensitivity analyses

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## Bias: What do we mean by bias?

- Statistical theory (not further covered here)
  - Sample variation
  - Estimation: if expected value = true value, estimator is unbiased
  - Asymptotically unbiased if value converges to true value if  $n \rightarrow \infty$
  - Bias-variance trade-off in prediction
- Publication bias (not further covered here)
- Bias due to “distorting” true relationships: <https://catalogofbias.org/> (CEBM/University of Oxford)
  - E.g., confounding incl. “confounding by indication”
  - E.g., selection bias (incl. “immortal time bias”)
  - E.g., measurement bias/assessment bias
  - (...)
- Bias analysis (E-values! - VanderWeele TJ, Ding P. Sensitivity Analysis in Observational Research: Introducing the E-Value. Ann Intern Med. 2017 Aug 15;167(4):268-274. doi: 10.7326/M16-2607. Epub 2017 Jul 11. PMID: 28693043.)

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## “Distorting” true relationships

What is a “true relationship”?

Example: What is the true odds ratio (OR) for a specific exposure and a specific event?

Operational definition: The true OR is the odds ratio that would be observed in a **perfectly executed randomized clinical trial (RCT)** that is large enough to make sample variation practically unimportant.

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## “Distorting” true relationships (cont.)

The following aspects have to be addressed:

- Selection bias
- Measurement bias (misclassification – outcome or covariate; exposure misclassification; systematically missing activities/episodes, e.g., in activity data; recall bias, telescoping bias, etc.)
- Blinding/masking of evaluators
- Cases and non-cases/controls need identical ways to determine covariates and outcomes!
- “Immortal time bias” in time-to-event analyses
- Differential loss-to-follow-up
- “Artefacts” due to utilizing existing data for a different purpose (e.g., billing data; medical prescription data to determine adherence to medication)

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### “Distorting” true relationships (cont.)

Related to data analysis:

- Collection/extraction of data
- Should the analyst be blinded to treatment group? (“Group A” vs “Group B” instead of explicit “Treatment” and “Control”)
- Unintentional programming errors
- Undetected problems with the convergence of computational algorithms
- Validation of the data incl. approaches to unusual observations
- “fishing expeditions” (and multiplicity in testing in general)
- Any form of “P-value maximization approaches”, such as
  - thresholds for continuous variables to achieve “maximal significance”
  - picking definitions for events, exposure measures, etc. based on resulting “significance”
  - etc., etc.,...

Make sure your statistical plan does not raise these concerns!

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### Intend-to-treat analysis (ITT)

- Evaluation of participants as randomized
- Protects against bias due to, e.g.,
  - differential loss to follow-up
  - differential adherence to the treatment
- Breaks down if missing data is present!
- Often combined with an “per-protocol” or “as-treated” analysis (see Hulley et al ch. 11)

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### Clustering/grouping of observations

- Is there any grouping structure you should account for?
- Group/cluster randomization? (Contamination of groups; not practical to individually randomize)
- Adjustment in other grouping structures (e.g., physician office even when individually randomized) that can/should be addressed in the analysis? (Often in form of mixed effects models with grouping structure being a random effect)

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## Pre-planned vs. ad hoc subgroup analyses

- Ad hoc analyses will be made and should be acknowledged (e.g., when safety issues arise during the trial)
- Pre-plan what is important to you and adjust for the multiplicity in testing accordingly
- Think about details, e.g.:
  - ANOVA with post-hoc analysis using Tukey’s honest significant difference
  - Dunnett’s test to adjust for a single comparison/control group but several active intervention groups

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## Fishing expeditions

“Throw everything in the kitchen sink to the wall and see what sticks”

Here is what can stick:

Facts about Abraham Lincoln and John Fitzgerald Kennedy and their assassinations in 1865 and 1963, respectively. Jones and Muirhead (2012) found the following:

1. They were elected 100 years apart (1860 and 1960)
2. They were both assassinated on a Friday in the presence of their wives
3. Lincoln was shot in **Ford’s** Theatre; Kennedy was shot in a **Ford** car.
4. Both assassins were known by three names – John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald, with 15 letters in each complete name.
5. Booth shot Lincoln in a theatre and fled to a warehouse; Oswald shot Kennedy from a warehouse and fled to a theatre.
6. Both succeeding vice-presidents named Johnson (Andrew and Lyndon), with 13 letters in their names and born 100 years apart (1808 and 1908).

Can this be coincidence?  
See Jones and Muirhead (2012):  
<https://rss.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1740-9713.2012.00545.x>

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## You can easily do better!

Follow this principle to avoid the worst pitfalls:

**“Draw your assumptions before your conclusions.”**

Miguel Hernán, Prof. of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Harvard CAUSALab

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## PCORI's HTE guidelines

Varadhan R, Stuart EA, Louis TA, Segal JB, Weiss CO.  
**Review of Guidance Documents for Selected Methods in Patient Centered Outcomes Research: Standards in Addressing Heterogeneity of Treatment Effectiveness in Observational and Experimental Patient Centered Outcomes Research.**

Source: <http://www.pcori.org/assets/Standards-in-Addressing-Heterogeneity-of-Treatment-Effectiveness-in-Observational-and-Experimental-Patient-Centered-Outcomes-Research.pdf>; PCORI; 2012. Accessed 01/23/2015.

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### 5: Standards for Heterogeneity of Treatment Effects

**HT-1 State the goals of HTE analyses**

State the inferential goal of each HTE analysis, specifying how it is related to the topic of the research, translate this into an analytic approach, and highlight the linkages between the two. Identify analyses as hypothesis driven (sometimes denoted confirmatory), or hypothesis generating (sometimes denoted exploratory).

**HT-2 For all HTE analyses, pre-specify the analysis plan; for hypothesis-driven HTE analyses, pre-specify hypotheses and supporting evidence base**

The study protocol should unambiguously pre-specify planned HTE analyses. Pre-specification of hypothesis-driven HTE analyses should include a clear statement of the hypotheses the study will evaluate, including how groups will be defined (e.g., by multivariate score or stratification) and outcome measures, and the direction of the expected treatment effects. The pre-specified hypotheses should be based on prior evidence, which should be described clearly in the study protocol and published paper.

Source: <http://www.pcori.org/assets/Standards-in-Addressing-Heterogeneity-of-Treatment-Effectiveness-in-Observational-and-Experimental-Patient-Centered-Outcomes-Research.pdf>; PCORI; 2012. Accessed 01/23/2015.

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**HT-3 All HTE claims must be based on appropriate statistical contrasts among groups being compared, such as interaction tests or estimates of differences in treatment effect**

A common error in HTE analyses is to claim differences in treatment effect when one group shows a statistically significant treatment effect and another does not. To claim differences in treatment effect among subgroups, appropriate statistical methods must be used to directly contrast them. Such contrasts include, but are not limited to, interaction tests, differences in treatment effect estimates with standard errors, or a variety of approaches to adjusting the estimated subgroup effect, such as Bayesian shrinkage estimates. Within each subgroup level, studies should present the treatment effect estimates and measures of variability.

**HT-4 For any HTE analysis, report all pre-specified analyses and, at minimum, the number of post hoc analyses, including all subgroups and outcomes analyzed**

Protocols and study reports must report the exact procedures used to explore HTE, including data mining or any automatic regression approaches. HTE analyses should clearly report the procedures by which subgroups were defined (e.g., by categorical predictors or continuous risk scores) and the effective number of subgroups and outcomes examined. If a non-prespecified stratum or subgroup is claimed to show a treatment effect that is different from others, methods should be used that account for the number of contrasts examined. These methods include, but are not limited to, p-value adjustment, false discovery rates, Bayesian shrinkage estimates, adjusted confidence intervals, and validation methods (internal or external).

Source: <http://www.pcori.org/assets/Standards-in-Addressing-Heterogeneity-of-Treatment-Effectiveness-in-Observational-and-Experimental-Patient-Centered-Outcomes-Research.pdf>; PCORI; 2012. Accessed 01/23/2015.

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## HTE

- Definition HTE:  
“the non-random, explainable variability in the direction and magnitude of treatment effect”
- Beneficial and adverse responses of interest
- Assessment of HTE is **essential** in patient-centered outcomes research
- Stakeholders such as patients, clinicians, and policy makers have to understand HTE to make informed decisions

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## HTE (cont.)

Two main goals:

1. Estimate treatment effect for clinically relevant subgroups (→ subgroup analysis)
2. Predict whether a specific individual might benefit from treatment (→ predictive learning; not covered here)

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## HTE (cont.)

- Subgroup analysis (SGA) is the most common analytic approach for examining HTE
- They propose **minimum** standards for SGA:
  - Prior planning
  - Careful analysis
  - Responsible reporting

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## HTE (cont.)

Two types of SGA:

1. estimating treatment effect separately within levels of baseline covariates
2. modeling the interaction between the treatment and covariates

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## How are HTEs assessed?

Common approach - example:

Outcome Y is binary and logistic regression is estimated. Treatment effect is log-odds ratio of

$Y = 1$  when treatment indicator 1 vs. 0  
("averaged" over other covariates)

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## How are HTEs assessed? (Cont.)

Separate models are estimated within strata of covariates, say,  $X = 1$  and  $X = 2$ , resulting in  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$ .

HTE is inferred when association in group 1 is statistically significant and in group 2 is not, or vice-versa.

Observation: This is **incorrect** for inferring HTE (but it is correct for estimating stratified treatment effects)

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## How are HTEs assessed? (Cont.)

At a minimum: Test for HTE needs to test whether the difference between the two stratified treatment effects is zero using a Wald test. (Default in SAS PROC FREQ RISKDIFF option is METHOD=WALD)

Better: Model the interaction between treatment and X

$$g(E[Y | X, A]) = b_0 + b_A A + b_X X + b_{A,X} A * X$$

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## How are HTEs assessed? (Cont.)

$$g(E[Y | X, A]) = b_0 + b_A A + b_X X + b_{A,X} A * X$$

Stratified effects :  $b_A = \theta_1$  and  $b_{A,X} = \theta_2$

Interaction term :  $b_{A,X} = \theta_2 - \theta_1$

Test for significance of interaction term!  
Easy to implement even when X has more than two levels or is continuous.

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## Should there be adjustments for multiplicity in testing?

PCORI complains about “the myopic view of SGA as a hypothesis testing problem rather than as an estimation problem” and the “dichotomization of SGA into confirmatory (hypothesis-testing) and exploratory (hypothesis-generating) analyses”

Suggestion: [descriptive](#) HTE analysis

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### Which type of subgrouping variables?

- Demographics (e.g., **age and sex – always?**)
- Behavior (e.g., smoking)
- pathophysiology (e.g., measures of disease severity)
- genetic markers
- comorbid conditions (e.g., diabetes status in cardiovascular disease trials)
- “Studies might use descriptive HTE for sub-populations for which limited evidence is available in the literature, such as the priority populations specified by the Agency for Healthcare Research Quality, including women, children, minorities, elderly, individuals with disabilities, and rural populations” (p. 3)

Source: <http://www.pccri.org/assets/Standards-in-Addressing-Heterogeneity-of-Treatment-Effectiveness-in-Observational-and-Experimental-Patient-Centered-Outcomes-Research.pdf>; PCCRI; 2012. Accessed 01/23/2015.

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### Should there be adjustments for multiplicity in testing? (cont.)

“In descriptive HTE analysis, the focus is on estimation of treatment effects in pre-specified subgroups. Each study reports these effect estimates and their **standard errors** in order to **facilitate future meta-analysis.**”

→ No, **descriptive** HTE analysis does not need to be adjusted for multiplicity in testing, but confidence intervals have to be provided.

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### Should an HTE-analysis be reported even when the overall treatment effect is not statistically significant?

Yes!

Argument: There is no theoretical argument that suggests that, e.g., males and females cannot have effects in opposite direction effectively cancelling when “averaging” (especially when comparison is not placebo).

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## What should be reported and why?

- Point estimates and standard errors to facilitate future meta-analyses
- All HRT tests even if not statistically significant because statistical significance is not necessarily expected when study is not powered adequately (but descriptive HTE still adequate)

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Table 1. The essential characteristics of the three different types of HTE analyses.

Properties	Confirmatory HTE Analysis	Descriptive HTE Analysis	Exploratory HTE Analysis
Inferential Goal	To test hypotheses related to subgroup effects	To report treatment effects for future synthesis	To generate hypotheses for further study
Number of subgroups analyzed	A small number, typically, one or two	Moderate to large	Not made explicit, but may be large
Scientific rationale and prior evidence for hypotheses	Strong	Immaterial	Weak or none
Pre-specification of data analytic strategy	Fully pre-specified	Fully pre-specified	Not pre-specified

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Table 1. The essential characteristics of the three different types of HTE analyses.

Properties	Confirmatory HTE Analysis	Descriptive HTE Analysis	Exploratory HTE Analysis
Control of family-wise type I error probability	Should be done	Not needed	Difficult, since it is not obvious how many related tests were performed
Characterization of sampling properties of the statistical estimator (e.g., standard errors, type-I error rate)	Easy to achieve	Possible	Difficult
Power for testing hypothesis	Ideally, study designed to have sufficient power	Likely to be inadequately powered, but this is immaterial	Typically, inadequate power to examine several hypotheses

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**4.2 Related Tools, Software and/or Code**

All data will be shared as comma-separated values (CSV) files with UTF-8 encoding that do not require specific software for reading/encoding. Data sets will be of rectangular arrangement with rows corresponding to participants.



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**4.3 Standards**

Mostly standardized questionnaires are used such as the DHQ III, GPAQ, or PROMIS. A detailed account is available in the Manual of Procedures (MOP), Chapter 11: Data Collection. Unique participant identifiers will link entries in the various data sets. Data dictionaries will be provided for the available data sets.

DHQ III = Diet History Questionnaire III  
GPAQ = Global Physical Activity Questionnaire  
PROMIS = Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (NIH)



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**List of all nutrients and food groups available from DHQ III**

- Expand All Collapse All
- Carbohydrate Constituents
- Carotenoids and Tocopherols
- Dietary Constituents from Supplements (reported separately in output files)
- Fats, Fatty Acids, & Cholesterol
  - Cholesterol
  - Total saturated fatty acids
  - Total monounsaturated fatty acids
  - Total polyunsaturated fatty acids
  - Solid Fat
  - SFA 4:0 (Butanoic)
  - SFA 6:0 (Hexanoic)
  - SFA 8:0 (Octanoic)
  - SFA 10:0 (Decanoic)
  - SFA 12:0 (Dodecanoic)
  - SFA 14:0 (Tetradecanoic)
  - SFA 16:0 (Hexadecanoic)
  - SFA 18:0 (Octadecanoic)
  - MFA 16:1 (Hexadecenoic)
  - MFA 18:1 (Octadecenoic)
  - MFA 20:1 (Eicosenoic)
  - MFA 22:1 (Docosenoic)
  - PFA 18:2 (Octadecadienoic)
  - PFA 18:3 (Octadecatrienoic)
  - PFA 18:3n3 (Alpha-linolenic)
  - PFA 18:4 (Octadecatetraenoic)
  - PFA 20:4 (Eicosatetraenoic)
- Food Pyramid Equivalents
- Macronutrients & Energy
- Minerals
  - Calcium
  - Phosphorus
  - Magnesium
  - Iron
  - Zinc
  - Copper
  - Selenium
  - Sodium
  - Potassium
  - Manganese
- Other
- Protein Constituents
- Vitamins



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## Health Sciences Library Research Support

<https://www.uthsc.edu/library/research.php>  
<https://libguides.uthsc.edu/data/uthsc-data>

**General Support Services, email [library@uthsc.edu](mailto:library@uthsc.edu)**  
 Literature searches, systematic reviews, citation managers

**Data Support Services, email [jnewman@uthsc.edu](mailto:jnewman@uthsc.edu)**  
 Assessing & improving research impact (h-index, citation metrics, etc)  
 Writing Data Management Plans (DMPs)  
 Selecting appropriate data repositories for storage and sharing  
 Basic data wrangling in Excel and OpenRefine  
 Enhancing data visualizations  
 Locating data for re-use  
 Identifying & evaluating journals for publication  
 Open Access publishing  
 Copyright and licensing



**Jess Newman, MSIS**  
 Research Data and Scholarly Communications Lead at the Health Sciences Library

*Slide content provided by the UTHSC Library/Jess Newman*

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**Michelle Martin, PhD**  
 Co-Director TN-CTSI



**Karen Johnson, MD, MPH**  
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Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and Research Design (BERD) Unit  
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**BERD Consulting Manager – Tristan Hayes**  
[thayes@uthsc.edu](mailto:thayes@uthsc.edu)

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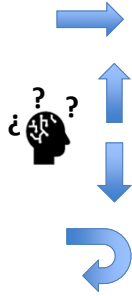
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Thank you!

Questions?

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