

P.E.A.R.L.S. Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations



Response rates to postal questionnaires can be increased

Clinical Question	How can response rates to postal questionnaires be increased?
Bottom Line	Response rates to postal questionnaires can be increased by contacting people before they are sent the questionnaire. Questionnaires should be sent by first-class post or recorded delivery, and a stamped-return envelope provided. Questionnaires and letters should be maybe personal, and kept short. Incentives should be offered (preferably a small amount of money), and one or more reminders should be sent with a copy of the questionnaire to people who do not reply.
Context	Postal questionnaires are widely used for data collection in epidemiological studies but non-response can reduce effective sample size and can introduce a bias. Finding ways of increasing response rates would improve the quality of health research.
Caveat	The odds of response were reduced when the questionnaire included questions of a sensitive nature, when questionnaires began with the most general questions or when participants were offered an opportunity to opt out of the study.
Reference	Edwards P et al. Methods to increase response rates to postal questionnaires. Cochrane Review 2007. Issue 1. This review contains 69 trials and 64029 participants.
Date (Author)	May 2007 (Brian R McAvoy)

NNT = numbers needed to treat to benefit one person

NNH = numbers needed to harm to benefit one person

Both NNT and NNH are only reported if the studies or pooling of studies is statistically significant

Disclaimer : The P.E.A.R.L.S. are for educational use only and are not meant to guide clinical activity nor are they a clinical guideline