

# Improving the visibility of online content: search engine optimisation toolkit for OMFS teams.



# Background

When it comes to internet traffic, search ranking (SEO) is king. 94% of users click on one of the first 10 sites returned to them by a google search – meaning if content we produce falls outside of this, it is very very unlikely to be seen organically. Simply improving search rank from 11th – 10th increases organic site traffic by 143%.

Searching for common keyword associated with maxillofacial surgery reveals that: BAOMS currently comes 10th for the search term "broken jaw". BAOMS ranks 35th or "facial surgery" and 25th "mouth cancer".

A potential issue arising from this limited appearance in google search results is in generating organic new traffic. For instance, patients are likely to search in layman's terms, and not include jargon keywords in their search sting such as "BAOMS" or use medical terminology at all. This means that when searching they are directed to content which may not be produced by medical professionals, may not be accurate, but is prominent in search result fields.

The google search algorithm is extremely complex, and is not publicly available. However, there are many optimisations that webmasters and content producers can make to their online content to improve its ranking in google results. An improvement in this domain would mean more patients directed to high quality accurate content. Driving more traffic towards OMFS specific content may be of benefit to individuals, teams and organisations publishing OMFS content online.

There is excellent professionally written patient centred content out there, but searching in lay terms, patients may be unlikely to find and benefit from it.

The purpose of this guide is to enable those who produce OMFS content to optimise their web design to ensure their excellent content reaches the widest possible audience.

## Why aren't we ranking well?

For illustration purposes, the following table demonstrates the BAOMS website ranking on google for the search terms listed. The top 10 URLs are also listed for comparison.

Search term	BAOMS website ranking	Top 10 URLs returned by google
"broken jaw"	10	<a href="http://medlineplus.gov">medlineplus.gov</a> <a href="http://webmd.com">webmd.com</a> <a href="http://healthline.com">healthline.com</a> <a href="http://medicalnewstoday.com">medicalnewstoday.com</a> <a href="http://hey.nhs.uk">hey.nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://colgate.com">colgate.com</a> <a href="http://emedicinehealth.com">emedicinehealth.com</a> <a href="http://drfarole.com">drfarole.com</a> <a href="http://health.harvard.edu">health.harvard.edu</a> <a href="http://baoms.org.uk">baoms.org.uk</a>
"mouth cancer"	25	<a href="http://nhs.uk">nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://mayoclinic.org">mayoclinic.org</a> <a href="http://macmillan.org.uk">macmillan.org.uk</a> <a href="http://healthline.com">healthline.com</a> <a href="http://mouthcancerfoundation.org">mouthcancerfoundation.org</a> <a href="http://cancerresearch.org">cancerresearch.org</a> <a href="http://medicalnewstoday.com">medicalnewstoday.com</a> <a href="http://webmd.com">webmd.com</a> <a href="http://nhsinform.scot">nhsinform.scot</a> <a href="http://dentalhealth.org">dentalhealth.org</a>
"facial surgery"	35	<a href="http://spirehealthcare.com">spirehealthcare.com</a> <a href="http://webmd.com">webmd.com</a> <a href="http://nuffieldhealth.com">nuffieldhealth.com</a> <a href="http://theyorkshireclinic.co.uk">theyorkshireclinic.co.uk</a> <a href="http://ramsayhealth.co.uk">ramsayhealth.co.uk</a> <a href="http://nhs.uk">nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://nhs.uk">nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://transforminglives.co.uk">transforminglives.co.uk</a> <a href="http://leedsth.nhs.uk">leedsth.nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://leedsth.nhs.uk">leedsth.nhs.uk</a>
"wisdom tooth extraction"	10	<a href="http://nhs.uk">nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://nhs.uk">nhs.uk</a> <a href="http://mayoclinic.org">mayoclinic.org</a> <a href="http://webmd.com">webmd.com</a> <a href="http://youtube.com">youtube.com</a> <a href="http://youtube.com">youtube.com</a> <a href="http://healthline.com">healthline.com</a> <a href="http://bupa.co.uk">bupa.co.uk</a> <a href="http://healthlinkbc.ca">healthlinkbc.ca</a> <a href="http://baoms/org.uk">baoms/org.uk</a>

When visiting pages which rank well, there are a number of features that are apparent, and some that require a little more digging. (right click, view page source is a good start) – all of these factor into search ranking, and in turn, into page clicks.

Pages which rank highly provide a good user experience, producing reactive content that works perfectly on mobile devices. Pages are densely and relevantly linked to other content of interest. On closer inspection, they provide specific page descriptions and plenty of effective metadata and keywords, and are kept up to date.

In contrast, pages which rank less well, often have confusing navigation systems, don't provide accurate or relevant metadata to googles crawler bots. They may require too much digging from the user to "be worth it", or they may simply display an uninspiring or "bland" PDF document which results in people clicking back and seeking information elsewhere.

There is good evidence to suggest that users do not look for content beyond the first page of google results – **only 6% of users scroll beyond 10 results** – to reach the 94%, we must do better.

The google algorithm is very complex, and not publicly available. However there are a number of factors which are known to impact search ranking and therefore online presence. This toolkit is a basic guide for anyone who is putting OMFS content online to review, refine their work and improve their chances of organic site traffic.

By cultivating a community of high quality, well designed well optimised pages, not only will the profile of OMFS be enhanced generally, which may benefit many domains such as recruitment and student engagement, but our patients will be better able to access the key relevant and accurate information.



# SEO Glossary

**Crawling / crawler** – this is how search engines discover your page.

**Equivalence** – the content of your mobile optimised and desktop site should be equivalent. "Light versions" can negatively impact SEO as the crawlers usually index your site based on the mobile version.

**Googletrends** – a free resource to explore how search traffic changes over time in your area. A useful place to trial keywords and identify relevant terms which may be useful to include in your metadata and page descriptions.

**Googleadsense** – a paid system which facilitates page ranking by sponsored adverts.

**Indexing** – once crawled, your site is held in an index by the search engine.

**Keywords** – words that accurately describe your page. e.g. a page about wisdom teeth may use the keywords "wisdom tooth" "surgery" "extraction"

**Lazy loading** – This is where instead of loading your whole webpage, parts that can be delayed are only loaded when required for the user to interact with them. This markedly improves performance and loading time.

**Meta description** – This is metadata that accurately describes each page of your website.

**Metadata** – This is data about your website. Title, date modified, keywords, page description, tags, are all examples of metadata

**Navigation** – this is the system by which the average user gets around your website.

**Organic traffic** – this is visitors to your website who have found it by chance not by paid advertisement.

**Reactive design** – your webpage will automatically display a device optimised version of the page when visited from different devices. E.g. if someone lands on your page on their smartphone or tablet the displayed page will be optimised.

**Retention** – The average time spent on a page is <10 seconds. Retention is the process of extending this for people visiting your page.

**SEO** – Search Engine Optimisation – the process of improving the performance of your page in search rankings to increase organic traffic.

**Snippet** – This is when google uses your meta description to give users a taste of your content in the search results page.

**Sitemap** – A file which delineates the structure of links of your webpage. An accurate sitemap shows web crawlers how to navigate your site. It is not displayed to the average user.

**Tags** – these are invisible to the user and form the metadata which tells web crawlers what your pages are all about.

**XML** – The file format for sitemaps.

# SEO Toolkit

Web traffic is essential if people are to see the content your team produces. Whether research, patient information, event planning, follow the toolkit below to boost traffic to your page.

## Great user experience

Once people find your site, keep them there



## Write specific page descriptions

Providing a page specific description tells google exactly what users will find on your page. This makes you more "rankable" for relevant search terms



## Stay up to date

Fresh up to date content will be re-crawled by google, enhancing ranking



## Provide metadata & tags

Metadata tells google about the type of content found on your page. Rich detailed metadata flags your page to relevant search terms and improves your rank.

Tags unlike keywords can associate your content with the type of content. E.g. blog

Description tags allow google to display a snippet of your content on their search results as a taster for browsing users.



## Define keywords

Find out what users are searching for. Tailor your keywords and your content accordingly.

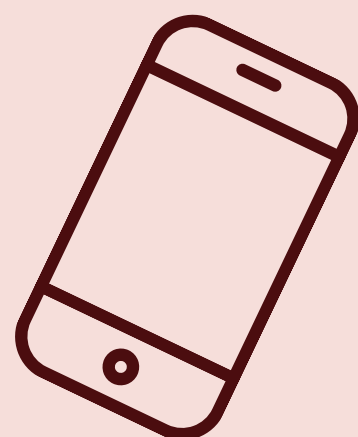
Keywords you select should also be found within the content on your page to be scored for relevance.



## Be mobile friendly

2/3 of searches are on mobile devices. Rank well with reactive mobile content which can be viewed on a variety of devices.

Your website should not limit functionality for mobile users.



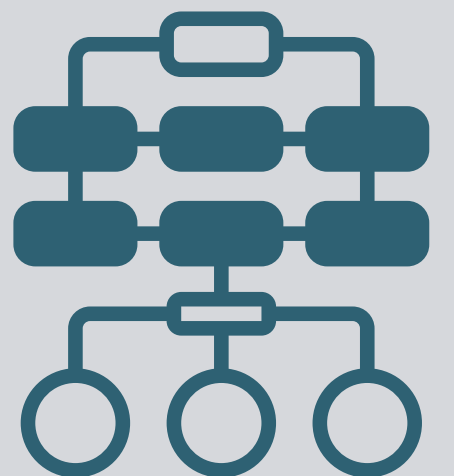
## Produce a sitemap

Make things easy.

A sitemap provides a roadmap of your website to googles crawler bots.

The more simple and logical the flow of pages, the better the rank.

Avoid randomly linking to irrelevant pages.





# Great user experience

## Quality content

The content on all of your pages needs to be accurate and of high quality. It should deliver very clearly and concisely what the user is hoping to find when they navigate to the page – content like this is more likely to be shared, quoted and revisited.



## Up to date

It is essential that webpages are kept up to date. Web crawlers used by search engines will not rank pages which are not updated regularly. Update frequency can be embedded in the page metadata to signpost to search engines that your content is fresh.

## Visitor retention

A significant factor in search ranking is how 'engaging' your content is, and how long visitors tend to stay on your page.

Serving irrelevant content, or making your page tricky to navigate will mean users very quickly return to their search results and look elsewhere.



When searching for information users spend as little as 15s before leaving a webpage.



Even if your content is amazing, if it is hidden by your cluttered page and confusing navigation users will simply leave.

## Navigation

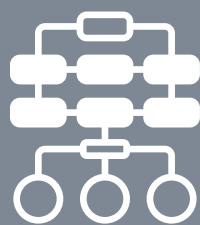
Do your users know where they are in your site?  
Is it clear where to head for further information on a topic?  
Avoid randomly connecting all pages of your site with each other, prefer instead a logical hierarchy with a simple breadcrumb trail for users to follow:

[Home](#) / [Patient information](#) / [What to eat after jaw surgery?](#)

When following a link for "Learn how mouth cancer is treated" – users will expect high quality legible information about the treatment for cancer. If there is distracting ancillary content which could live on its own page, this is likely to result in users choosing to browse elsewhere.



## Produce a sitemap



Particularly if you have lots of content, maybe some aimed at professionals, and some aimed at patients, a simple page laying out the structure of your site is useful for users as a "map of content"

By uploading the structure and hierarchy of your site in XML format, you provide a roadmap for search engines to crawl your site, resulting in improved search ranking.

It is important to maintain links in your navigation system, and remove links to older content, pruning your "navigation tree" to prevent users being directed to irrelevant content or deleted pages. Search engines will not rank pages which contain broken links.

# ABC Define keywords

## Key Points

- Keywords tell google what search terms to associate with your webpage. Remember that patients are likely to search in lay terms.
- Avoid including excessive unrelated keywords.
- GoogleTrends allows users to see popular related search queries; use these to choose keywords.

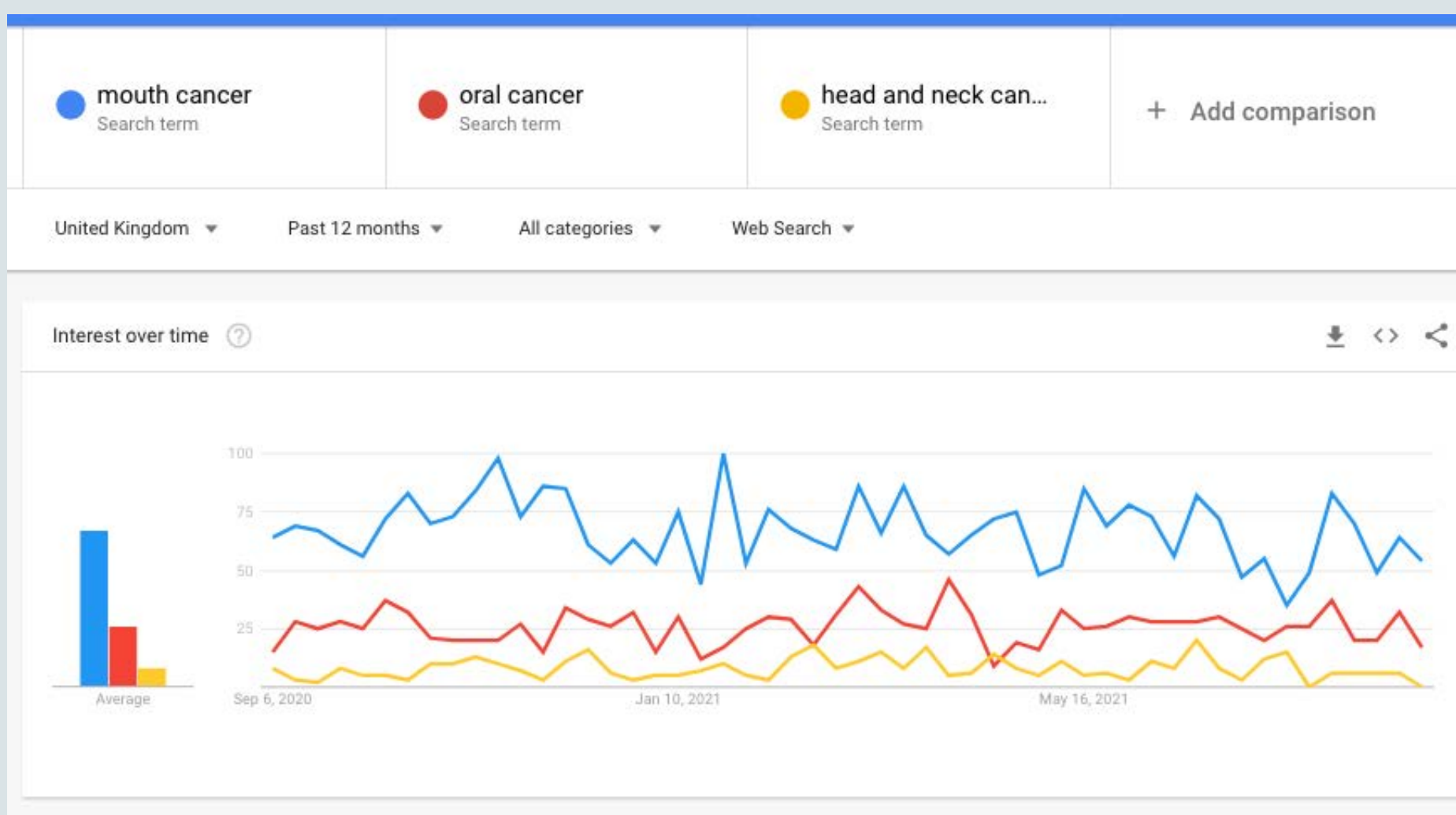
mouth cancer



oral cancer



H&N cancer



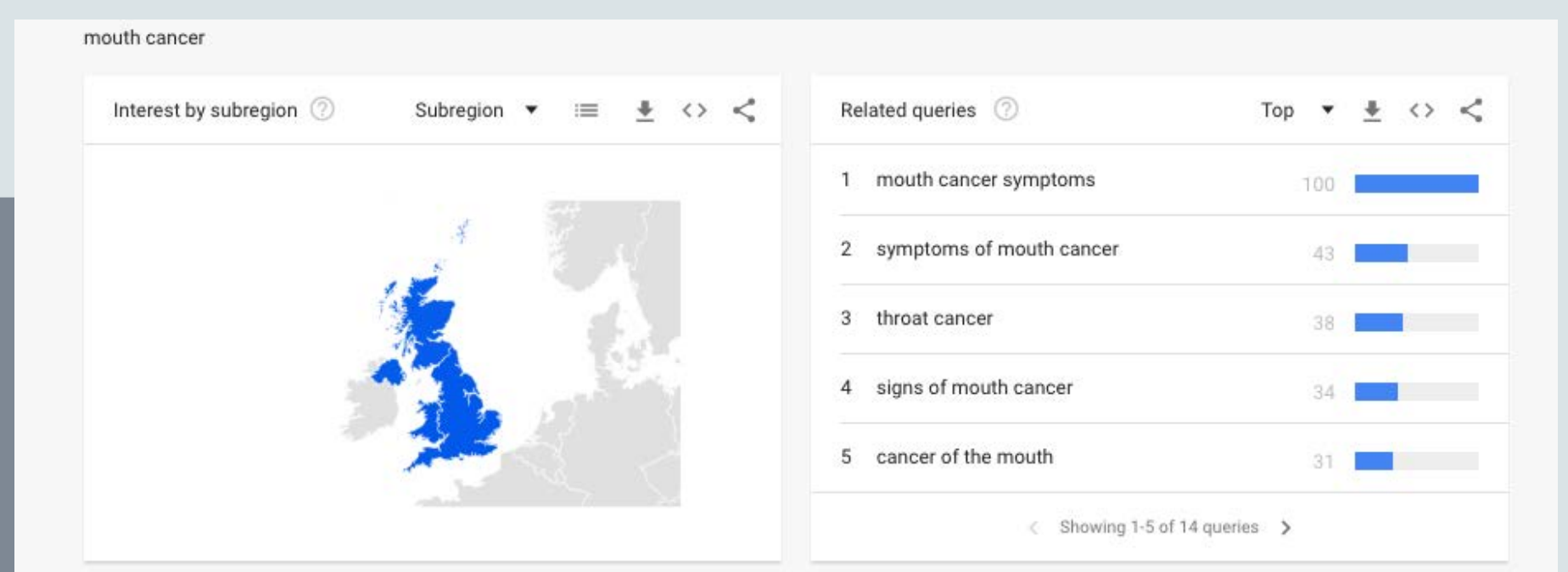
Notice how oral cancer has roughly 50% the interest of mouth cancer, whilst "Head and Neck cancer" only accounts for 2%...

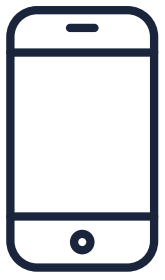
GoogleTrends enables you to compare the interest in any search term.

## Test different keywords & review related queries

Rather than including hundreds of vaguely related keywords, sites with keywords very specific to their pages can see what queries users are entering into google, and how those have changed over time.

Remember that users may not associate the same words to your page as you do, for instance, patients are more likely to search for mouth cancer than oral cancer, and very few would search for "Head and neck cancer". Use googletrends to assess which lay-terms are preferred





# Be mobile friendly

## Key Points

- Is your page built with the mobile user in mind or were they an afterthought?
- The majority of google searches are now performed on smartphones – patients will certainly search for your content on their mobile devices and tablets.
- Google preferentially ranks pages which are optimised for smartphones over those which are not.
- The mobile version of your site is the one which will be indexed in search results.
- Lots of mobile versions of webpages don't include the same detailed metadata that the desktop site would. Ensure that your mobile content is SEO optimised just as thoroughly, and provide meta <description> to build mobile friendly snippets.
- If your webpage is not responsive and displays poorly on smartphone, it will rank poorly meaning you miss out on site traffic.
- Mobile friendly content may be suitable for patients to access whilst with you in clinic, via QR codes. If patient information requires access to a desktop device when the patient gets home the chance of them engaging is far lower. It also increases the risk that they are diverted to other, better optimised, but less relevant content.

### Equivalence

- Your desktop and mobile site should serve the same content.

### Images

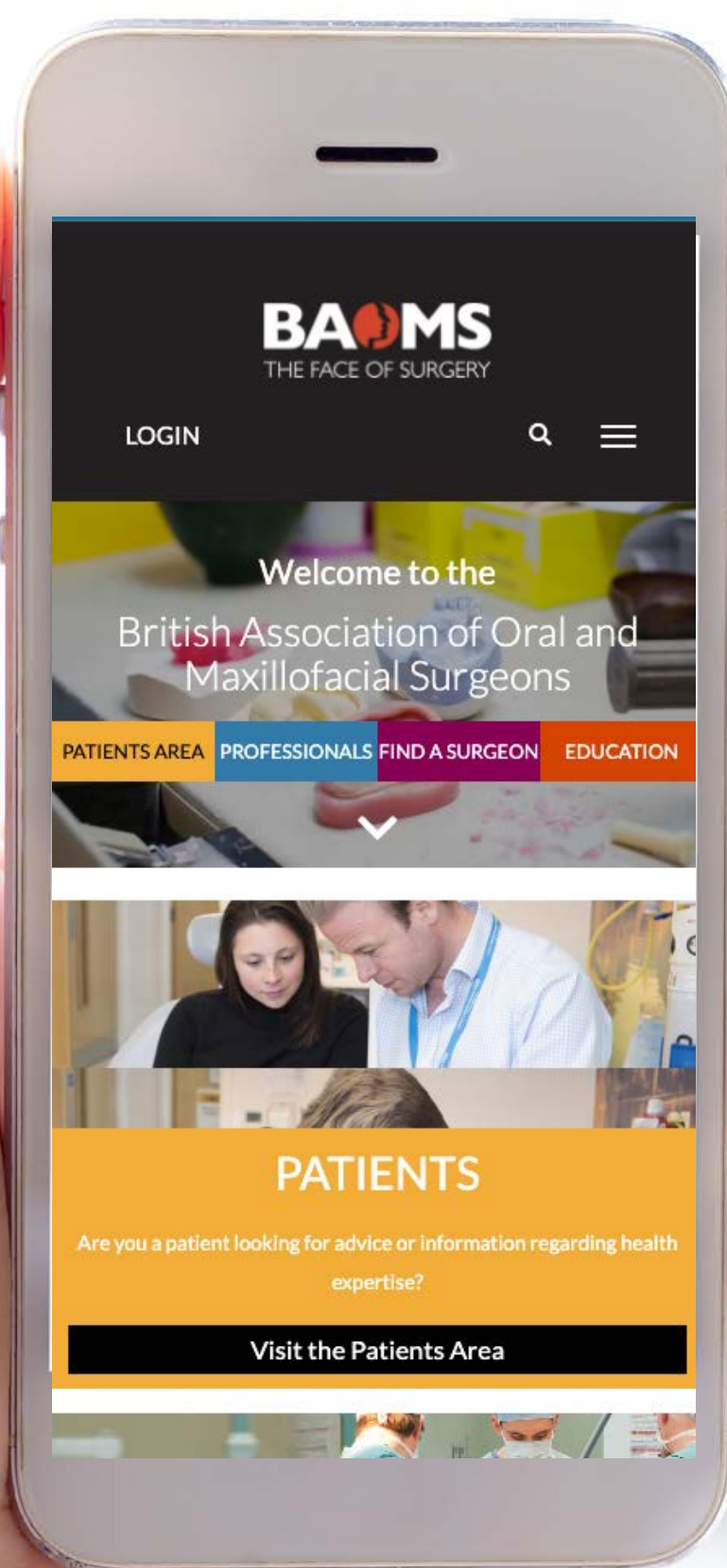
- Provide high quality images and graphics which can be scaled for any screen size.

### Responsive

- Mobile content should be responsive to any device and rescale dynamically on any display size.

### Lazy load

- Be careful with lazy loading. If lazy loaded content needs user input it won't be visible to google crawler bots.







# Write page specific descriptions

## Meta descriptions

Google uses your page title and meta description as a factor in search ranking. If your description closely matches what a user has searched for, Google may serve them a "snppet" of your site as a taster. Clearly this puts pages like this at a huge advantage

## <Title>

Make your title page specific and human readable. The <title> that google sees does not have to match the wording of your page. So your page title can form part of your description.

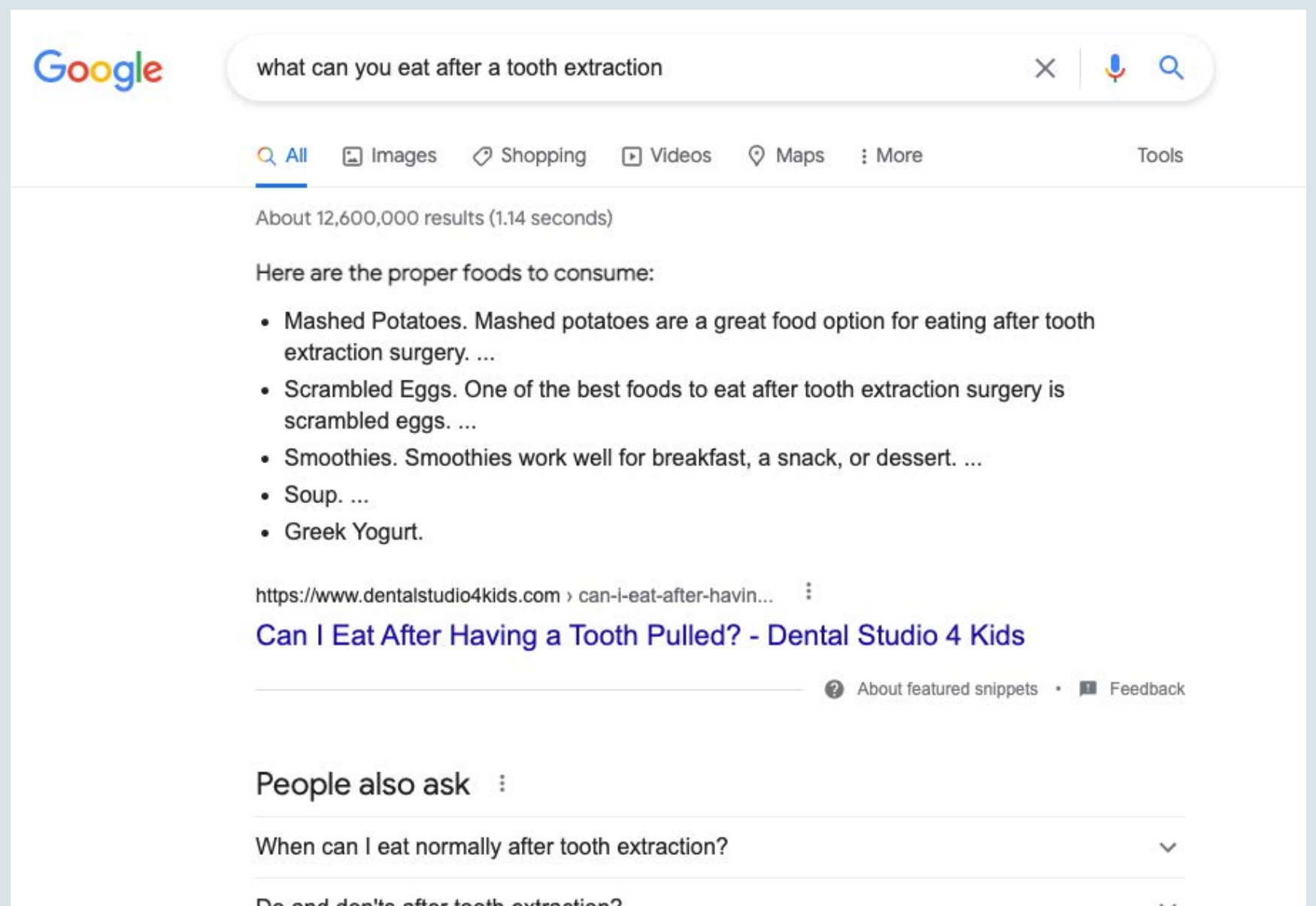
E.g your <title> could be "Find an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon in the UK"

But your users could see "Find a surgeon" when viewing the page.

## Stay up to date

Updating your page descriptions as your content changes will keep your ranking optimised.

Descriptions which no longer reflect the page content (e.g. describing the page as "article, video, image" when there are no videos on the page will result in poor ranking.



## Keep your description page specific and relevant

Endless lists of keywords won't do you any favours here. Your meta description needs to accurately reflect the content of your page and be "human readable"

e.g: "Summary of the reasons to have a fractured cheekbone fixed" would perform much better than "zygoma,cheekbone,repair, list, indications"

# # Metadata & tags

```
<html lang="en">
<head><title>
  Burning Mouth Syndrome | British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
</title><meta id="responsive_meta" name="viewport" content="user-scalable=no, initial-scale=1.0, maximum-scale=1.0, width=device-width"/><meta http-equiv="X-UA-Compatible" content="IE=edge" />
<meta name="generator" content="lmsitesterduke Build 8.0.59.6040 " />
```

Page 1

```
<head>
<meta charset="utf-8" />
<title>
  Burning mouth syndrome - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic</title>
<meta name="application-name" content="&nbsp;" />

<link rel="apple-touch-icon" href="/-/media/web/gbs/shared/images/apple-touch-icon-152x152.png">
<link rel="icon" href="/-/media/web/gbs/shared/images/favicon.png">
<meta name="msapplication-TileColor" content="#FFFFFF" />
<meta name="msapplication-TileImage" content="/-/media/web/gbs/shared/images/mstile-144x144.png" />

<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0" />
<meta name="format-detection" content="telephone=no">
<meta name="PocID" content="CON-20155302" />
<meta name="Subject" content="Burning mouth syndrome" />
<meta name="Subject" content="Stomatodynia" />
<meta name="Subject" content="Glossodynia" />
<meta name="Subject" content="Scalded mouth syndrome" />
<meta name="Subject" content="BMS" />
<meta name="Focus" content="" />
<meta name="Audience" content="" />

<meta name="Description" id="Description" content="This chronic burning, without an obvious cause, may affect the tongue, gums, lips, cheeks, roof of your mouth or widespread areas of your mouth."

<meta property="og:site_name" content="Mayo Clinic" />
<meta name="twitter:site" content="@mayoclinic" />
<meta name="twitter:card" content="summary" />
<meta name="twitter:creator" content="@mayoclinic" />
<meta name="twitter:title" content="Burning mouth syndrome - Symptoms and causes" />
<meta property="og:title" content="Burning mouth syndrome - Symptoms and causes" />
<meta name="twitter:description" content="" />
<meta property="og:description" content="" />
<meta name="twitter:image" content="https://www.mayoclinic.org/-/media/Web/GBS/Shared/Images/SocialMedia-Metadadata/MC_TwitterCard_120x120.jpg" />
<meta name="twitter:image:alt" content="MayoClinic.org" />
<meta property="fb:app_id" content="" />
<meta property="og:type" content="article" />
<meta property="og:url" content="https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911" />
<meta property="og:image" content="https://www.mayoclinic.org/-/media/Web/GBS/Shared/Images/SocialMedia-Metadadata/MC_OpenGraph_600x315.jpg" />
```

Page 2

```
<link rel="alternate" href="https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911" hreflang="en"/>
<link rel="alternate" href="https://www.mayoclinic.org/es-es/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911" hreflang="es"/>
<link rel="alternate" href="https://www.mayoclinic.org/ar/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911" hreflang="ar"/>
<link rel="canonical" href="https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911"/>
<meta name="PublishDate" content="2019-02-14" />
<script type="application/ld+json">{"@context":"https://schema.org","@type":"WebPage","name":"Burning mouth syndrome - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic","datePublished":"2019-02-14","url":"https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/burning-mouth-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20350911"}
</script>
```

## Metadata

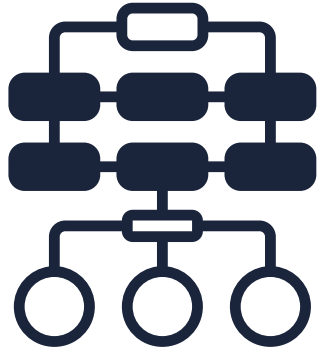
Put simply, metadata tells google what your page is about. Without it, your indexing in google relies on bots. By spelling out exactly what your pages are about, you dramatically improve the likelihood of your page showing up in search results.

Compare the metadata provided above. Page 1 is the current (Sept 2021) BAOMS metadata for the page about Burning Mouth syndrome – this page does not feature in google search results for BMS.

Contrast the detail provided in the metadata below produced by the page which currently ranks #1 on google for burning mouth syndrome.

Metadata allows you to provide a descriptive title, keywords, article type, update date, specify that there are synonyms which are relevant to your content (e.g glossodynia)

Particularly when designing content for patients this is an opportunity to improve search traffic by optimising this metadata using googletrends and googles keyword tools in their adsense suite.



# Consider a sitemap

## What is a sitemap?

A sitemap tells google the location of your webpages and how they all link together. Supplying a sitemap increases the chances that google's crawler bots will index the important pages on your site.

## Considerations

If your pages are not densely linked to each other (for example, pages about salivary pathology are unlikely to link naturally to orthognathic surgery) a sitemap will ensure that google's bots visit each of the pages you deem important within your site.

If your site is very small (for example for a single clinician) you may not need a sitemap if your pages are clear, easy to navigate, and correctly linked.

If you have mutiple versions of a page, for example mobile, web and PDF, a sitemap allows you to specify to google which version to point users to when searching for your content.

## Extra bits

The sitemap refers to pages which are "descendents" of the page to which it is attached.

Therefore to affect the most content (all pages), post your sitemap on the site root.



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