

Cancer Clinical Trials

What is a clinical trial?

A clinical trial is a research study that people volunteer to take part in. Clinical trials help doctors find better treatments for cancer and other diseases. Most new ways of finding, preventing, and treating cancer were discovered in clinical trials.

You might want to take part in a clinical trial for a specific reason or several reasons. Your doctor might recommend one. Or you might want to try a treatment that is not yet available to everyone, help other people with cancer, or help doctors get better at finding cancer.

What do doctors study in clinical trials?

Doctors and researchers are always looking for new ways to treat and cure cancer. There are many methods studied in clinical trials: new drugs, new surgical methods, different ways to deliver radiation therapy, and more. Some new cancer treatments are personalized based on the genes in a tumor. This is called “precision medicine” and is being studied a lot in clinical trials.

Doctors and researchers also do clinical trials to help improve the quality of life for people living with cancer by looking for better ways to relieve symptoms and side effects.

Are clinical trials safe for patients?

Yes, they are very safe. The U.S. government, and other governments around the world, have strict rules to protect patients. The clinical trial doctors and staff must follow these rules.

Before you decide to join a clinical trial, the staff will talk with you about the possible risks and benefits. They will tell you about any possible costs and side effects and answer your questions.

Will I get real medicine or a “sugar pill”?

A “sugar pill,” or placebo, is something that looks like the medicine or treatment that doctors are studying. However, it does not contain any real medicine. Using a placebo tells researchers if the study treatment works, because the study treatment is compared to no treatment at all.

If cancer clinical trials use placebos, they use them carefully. A placebo will never be used to replace treatments that are used to treat or cure cancer. This is because people with cancer need treatment for their serious disease. So, if you do not get the treatment doctors are learning about, you will probably get the usual treatment. For example, if doctors are learning about a new drug, you will probably get that or the usual drug.

Will I be paid for taking part?

That depends on the clinical trial. Some clinical trials pay for your travel, such as gasoline or bus tickets. Others pay a small amount of cash. Some do not pay anything.

Will my health insurance pay for the clinical trial?

Probably. The U.S. law requires insurance companies to pay for regular medical care in a clinical trial, but some tests and procedures may not be completely covered. Ask the clinical trial staff and your insurance company what your insurance will pay for the clinical trial.

Can children take part in clinical trials?

Yes. Most children with cancer take part in clinical trials. Many children taking part has made children’s cancer treatment more effective than in the past.



Do I have to stay in a clinical trial if I don't like it?

No. Taking part in a clinical trial is your choice. You may leave at any time. Your health care team will keep taking care of you, even if you leave the study. Being in a clinical trial is a personal choice.

If you leave a clinical trial, you will still get good medical care. You and your doctor will decide which treatments are best.

How do I find a clinical trial?

First, learn what clinical trials are available for people with your type of cancer or treatment. Ask your doctor or nurse if they know about any clinical trials. You can also check the website of your local hospital. Or visit www.clinicaltrials.gov or www.cancer.net to find open clinical trials.

Questions to ask your health care team

Your health care team can help you learn more about clinical trials. The list below has some questions you might want to ask.

- Do you know about any clinical trials I could take part in?
- Will you keep taking care of me if I take part in a clinical trial?
- How can I learn more about my clinical trial options?
- What are my other treatment options, including regular care (no clinical trial)?

Questions to ask the clinical trial staff

You can ask the clinical trial staff any questions before you decide to take part in a specific study. Below are some questions you can ask.

- What do doctors hope to learn in this clinical trial?
- What is the treatment being studied?
- Who is the sponsor for this clinical trial?
- Who reviewed and approved this clinical trial?
- What will I need to do if I take part?
- What are my risks and benefits in this clinical trial? How are they different from the risks and benefits of regular treatment?
- Where will the clinical trial be? Do I need to stay overnight at the hospital?
- Will it cost me anything to take part?

You can find more questions at www.cancer.net/clinicaltrials. For a digital list of questions, download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app.

The ideas and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) or The Conquer Cancer Foundation of ASCO. The information in this fact sheet is not intended as medical or legal advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a physician or other licensed health care provider. Patients with health care-related questions should call or see their physician or other health care provider promptly and should not disregard professional medical advice, or delay seeking it, because of information encountered here. The mention of any product, service, or treatment in this fact sheet should not be construed as an ASCO endorsement. ASCO is not responsible for any injury or damage to persons or property arising out of or related to any use of ASCO's patient education materials, or to any errors or omissions.

For Health Care Professionals: To order more printed copies, please call 888-273-3508 or visit www.cancer.net/estore.

Cancer.Net

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY

2318 Mill Road, Suite 800, Alexandria, VA 22314 | Toll Free: 888-651-3038 | Phone: 571-483-1300
www.asco.org | www.cancer.net | www.conquer.org
© 2018 American Society of Clinical Oncology. For permissions information, contact permissions@asco.org.

Words to Know

Caregiver:

Someone who helps with your medical care, daily activities, or both.

Consent:

Also called "informed consent. The process of learning about a clinical trial, asking questions, and deciding if you want to take part. The study staff tell you what doctors want to learn, your rights, and how you will be kept safe.

Dose:

The amount of medicine you use at each time.

Exclusion criteria:

The rules for who cannot take part in a clinical trial. For example, a clinical trial might only need volunteers who are 65 or older.

Inclusion criteria:

The rules for who can take part in a clinical trial. For example, the study may only include those with a specific type of cancer.

Medicine calendar:

A calendar that shows when you take each dose of medicine. You, your nurse, or your caregiver might write on the calendar. Or it might be on a computer or your phone.

Oncology nurse:

A member of your treatment team who specializes in caring for people with cancer. This includes giving some treatments.

Research monitor:

A member of the clinical trial team who visits your study staff to make sure everything happens correctly.

Review board:

A group of doctors and experts who read the clinical trial's plan before it starts. They help make sure it is safe for volunteers. Also called an "institutional review board.

MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH

CONQUER CANCER™
THE ASCO FOUNDATION