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Clinical Trials

You may have heard the words “clinical trial” and wondered what this is. Clinical trials are one way to get the most up-to-date cancer treatment.

Learning all you can and talking with your doctor or nurse and your family and friends can help you decide if a clinical trial is right for you. You are the only one who can make the choice to take part in a clinical trial.

What are clinical trials?

Clinical trials are research studies done with volunteers. These studies test whether a new treatment is safe and how well it works. Clinical trials may also test new ways to find or prevent a disease. These studies have led to many new ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer.

The purpose of clinical trials

Clinical trials are done to get a closer look at new treatments or procedures. A clinical trial is only done when there’s good reason to believe that the treatment or test being studied may be better than the one being used now (the standard treatment). Treatments used in clinical trials are often found to be helpful. If that happens, they may go on to become the standard treatment.

Clinical trials can test things like:

- New drugs that have not yet been approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration)
- New uses for drugs that are already approved
- Treatments, such as radiation therapy or surgery

- Herbs and vitamins
- New ways to combine treatments

Researchers study new treatments to try to answer questions like these:

- Is the treatment helpful?
- What's the best way to give it?
- Does it work better than other treatments now being used?
- What side effects does the treatment cause?
- Which patients will most likely be helped by this treatment?

What it's like to be in a clinical trial

If you are in a clinical trial, you will have a team of experts taking care of you and watching your progress closely. You may have more doctor visits and lab tests than you would with the standard treatment.

But there are some risks. No one knows ahead of time whether the treatment will work or just what side effects you might have. That's what the study is trying to find out. While most side effects go away in time, some may last a long time or even be life-threatening. But keep in mind that this is true for side effects from standard treatments, too.

Deciding to enter a clinical trial

If you would like to take part in a clinical trial, start by asking your doctor if your clinic or hospital does clinical trials. You must meet certain requirements, like having a certain type of cancer or not being pregnant, in order to take part in a clinical trial. But whether you take part is up to you.

Taking part in a clinical trial does not keep you from getting any other medical care you may need. And you are free to leave the clinical trial at any time, for any reason.

How can I find out more?

To find out more about clinical trials for your type of cancer, talk to your doctor or nurse.

The American Cancer Society can answer your questions about clinical trials, too. Call

us at 1-800-227-2345 or find more information online at www.cancer.org/clinicaltrials.

Last Medical Review: 08/01/2017

Last Revised: 08/01/2017

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