Clinical Trials

If you've been told you have cancer and are thinking about taking part in a clinical trial, you may find this tool to be helpful. The information included here provides answers to some of the most common questions people have about clinical trials. It also includes questions you can ask your doctor to help you make the decision that’s right for you.

Why are clinical trials needed for cancer treatments?

Cancer clinical trials are research studies done to find better ways to treat cancer. These studies look at whether a new treatment is safe and how well it works. Tens of thousands of people are helped each year because they choose to take part in clinical trials. And millions of other people benefit from what’s learned in clinical trials.

What is it like to be in a clinical trial?

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

There are some risks to being in a clinical trial. 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 treatment, too.

But there can also be benefits to being in a clinical trial. You'll either get the best treatment used for your type of cancer, or you'll get a new treatment that might turn out to be even better. In addition, you might get a new treatment that you wouldn't be able to get if you weren't in a clinical trial.

It is important to know that it’s your choice whether or not to be in a clinical trial. You can leave the study at any time for any reason without losing the care you would otherwise be getting if you hadn’t chosen to be in a clinical trial.

Will I be a “guinea pig?”

While some people worry that taking part in a clinical trial means being a nameless subject in an experiment, this is not the case. People in clinical trials may need to do certain things or have certain tests to stay in the study, but they get excellent care. In fact, most people in clinical trials like the extra attention they get from their cancer care and research teams.
Will I get a placebo?

Placebos (fake treatments) are rarely used alone in clinical trials unless there is no treatment known to work. Most cancer clinical trials do not use placebos. It’s not ethical to give someone a placebo instead of a treatment that’s known to work.

What questions should I ask before deciding to take part in a clinical trial?

There are many things you may want to know before you agree to be in a clinical trial. You might want to ask the cancer care and research teams:

- Why is this study being done?
- How long would I be in the clinical trial?
- How often would I need to be seen?
- Where would I have to go for treatment and tests?
- Who would I call if I have problems?
- Will I have to pay for anything?
- What are my other options?

You might want to talk to trusted family members and friends as you decide. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Learn as much as you can about any clinical trial that interests you so you can make the choice that’s best for you.

How can I find out more?

Start with your doctor. Ask about all your treatment options. For more information on clinical trials, please visit www.cancer.org/clinicaltrials or call 1-800-227-2345 to speak with one of our trained specialists.