

what is a clinical trial?

by the Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups



The Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups is a nonprofit organization committed to raising awareness about cancer clinical trials by providing services and products to help patients and caregivers with their treatment decisions.

Cancer clinical trials are a treatment option to consider at the time of your diagnosis. They provide patients at all stages of cancer with the most cutting edge medical treatment and the highest level of care.*

It is important for you to know about clinical trials when considering your options for cancer treatment. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was asked to take part in a clinical trial. At first the idea frightened me, but once I learned about clinical trials, I was more than happy to sign up. In fact, I chose a clinical trial for my ovarian cancer treatment too. With my clinical trials, I was confident that I was getting the best treatment option available and helping to find a cure for future cancer patients. – Monica Knoll

Please read the following pages to better understand clinical trials and how you can play a role in finding a cure!

*For more information about clinical trials, go to:
CancerTrialsHelp.org

Questions and answers

What is a clinical trial?

A clinical trial is a medical research study in which participants volunteer to test new methods to prevent, screen, diagnose, or treat a disease. A clinical trial is also called a clinical study or a protocol.

Effective treatment for cancer and strategies to prevent cancer are the direct results of cancer clinical trials. In fact all of today's recognized cancer treatments were proven by clinical trials.

Why are trials important?

Clinical trials increase our overall knowledge and progress against cancer. All of today's standard treatments for cancer began in clinical trials, such as the effectiveness of lumpectomy for breast cancer and new drugs for colon cancer.

There is no guarantee that a new treatment will be effective. But many decide that the possible benefits are greater than the risks. Participants receive either the standard of care (the most effective known treatment available), or the new medication or procedure under study. They have access to the latest drugs, procedures and other types of treatment. If a new treatment is effective, patients in trials are among the first to receive it.

Many people treated for cancer are now living longer thanks to the knowledge gained through clinical trials. Clinical trials are no longer seen as a last resort. Today, patients often choose to receive their first treatment in a clinical trial.

Where do clinical trials take place?

Clinical trials take place in doctors' offices, cancer centers, other medical centers, community hospitals and clinics, and veterans' and military hospitals in cities and towns across the United States and around the world. Ask your doctor where clinical trials that meet your needs are being conducted near you, or go to www.CancerTrialsHelp.org.

What are the phases of a cancer clinical trial?

Cancer clinical trials have four steps, called "phases." Each one answers a separate research question.

- Phase I trials evaluate safety.
 - Phase II trials measure effectiveness.
 - Phase III trials test against the best existing treatment.
 - Phase IV trials evaluate new uses or long-term effects of the treatment.
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What is a "randomized" clinical trial?

In a randomized clinical trial, the participants are assigned by chance to the standard treatment group (control group) or investigational treatment arm. In cancer clinical trials, the control group receives the standard treatment that is currently available.

Why are "randomized trials" important in developing new treatments for cancer?

Randomization in a cancer clinical trial gives each patient an equal chance of being assigned to any group. It is one way to prevent bias or unfairness in research.

What is standard therapy?

Standard therapy is a treatment that experts agree is the best practice or best standard of care.

What is an investigational drug?

A drug is investigational if it is being tested on people, but has not yet been approved for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for a certain use, purpose, disease or condition. A drug may be approved for use in one disease or condition, but still can be investigational for other uses.

What is the difference between "standard therapy" and "experimental therapy" in a clinical trial?

In medicine, standard therapy is the treatment that experts agree is the standard of care or best practice.
