

About Cancer Clinical Research

What is cancer clinical research?

Cancer research that involves people, or data or samples from people, is called cancer clinical research.

Studies like these have led to discoveries such as new medicines to treat cancer, new therapies to reduce the side effects of cancer or its treatment, and lifestyle changes people can make to lower chances of getting cancer.



Terms such as clinical trials, clinical research, and research studies generally mean the same thing and are often used interchangeably.

Types of cancer research you can join

Clinical trials and observational studies are two kinds of research studies that you can participate in. Your unique experience with or without cancer may help future generations lead longer, healthier lives. Use this table to compare and explore each type.

Study Type	Who Can Join	Study Goals	Example Activities	Discoveries
Treatment Clinical Trials	People with cancer	Tests new medicines, surgical procedures, and combining current treatments	Take a medicine, have surgery, get radiation	CAR-T cell therapy to treat cancers

Study Type	Who Can Join	Study Goals	Example Activities	Discoveries
Prevention Clinical Trials	People who had cancer in the past, and healthy volunteers*	Examines how to reduce risk of getting cancer or the return of cancer	Get a vaccine, change diet, give blood	HPV vaccine for cervical cancer
Screening Clinical Trials	Healthy volunteers	Find new ways to detect cancer before it causes symptoms and when it may be easier to treat	Give blood, provide saliva sample, get x-rays	National Lung Screening Trial to reduce lung cancer deaths
Supportive Care Clinical Trials	People with cancer	Explores ways to improve quality of life in people who have or had cancer	Try yoga and exercise, attend support groups, take a medicine	Palifermin for mouth sores after cancer treatment
Observational Studies	People with cancer and healthy volunteers	Follows participants over time to collect health information and analyze data; no treatment is given	Take a survey, get a genetic test, provide saliva sample, donate tumor tissue	Multivitamin use and risk of death in healthy people

*A healthy volunteer is someone with no known significant health problems.

Participation in Cancer Research Matters

I am so happy to have the opportunity to acknowledge the courage and generosity of an estimated 494,018 women who agreed to participate in randomized clinical trials with results reported between 1971 and 2018.

Their contributions showed that mammography can detect cancer at an early stage, that mastectomies and axillary lymph node dissections are not always necessary, that chemotherapy can benefit some people with early estrogen receptor-positive,

progesterone receptor-positive, HER2-negative breast cancer but is not needed for all, and that hormonal therapy can prevent disease recurrence.

For just the key studies that produced these results, it took the strength and commitment of almost 500,000 women. *I am the direct beneficiary of their contributions, and I am profoundly grateful.*

The true number of brave souls contributing to this reduction in breast cancer mortality over the past 30 years? Many millions. These are our heroes.

—From NCI Director’s Remarks by then-NCI Director Monica M. Bertagnolli, M.D., at the American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting, June 3, 2023



Monica Bertagnolli,
Director, NIH;
former director,
NCI; cancer
survivor

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