NIH NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE

Clinical Trial Facts

Cancer clinical trials are an opportunity to get help and contribute to research, but misunderstandings about what it means to join a study could steer people away. Knowing these facts can help you make an informed decision.

Wrong ideas about clinical trials can lead to worry and prevent good decisions. Consider all of the facts as you think about joining a trial.

1. Do I need a referral from my doctor to join a trial?

You do not need a referral from your doctor to take part in a clinical trial. However, a doctor can help you find clinical trials to meet your needs. You can start your own clinical trial search or use resources like NCI's Cancer Information Service to find trials for you when you are ready.

2. Are clinical trials only for advanced cancer?

No. People at any stage of cancer may take part in a study, as long as they meet the study's eligibility requirements. People without cancer are also needed for prevention and screening studies.

3. Will I have to give up my current treatment and care team?

For some studies, you may be able to take part while continuing your current treatment or after completing it. For example, some studies are testing whether vaccines can prevent cancer from coming back. The vaccine would be given along with usual treatments.

You can often continue to see your current care team alongside the study team while taking part in a trial. Always ask the study team how they will keep your current oncologist informed

about your care during the study.

4. Am I too old for a clinical trial?

Older age is often not a barrier to taking part in a trial. But some studies may require that you are within a certain age range to be eligible. It's important for people of all ages to join studies because our bodies and responses to medicine may change as we age. A younger person may respond differently to a treatment than an older person.

When people young and old take part in cancer clinical trials, researchers understand how well a treatment works across different age groups. Efforts are ongoing to increase the diversity of age groups who take part in clinical trials.

5. Should I join a clinical trial after treatments have failed?

Another common belief about cancer clinical trials is that they are only for people who have run out of treatment options. It's true that you can join a clinical trial to access experimental treatment when standard treatment is not available or no longer working for you. But some clinical trials are available to people at all stages of disease, even if you were recently diagnosed. If you need cancer treatment and are interested in joining a clinical trial, talk with your doctor or care team.

Some screening and prevention studies might also be available if you are receiving or finished with treatment. For example, some studies are looking at whether new screening tests are better than current tests at detecting cancer recurrence. Many studies are also open to people without cancer and those with a high risk of cancer.

6. Will I get lower quality care if I take part in a clinical trial?

No, you will not get lower quality care if you take part in a study. You will be closely monitored by the research team.

7. Will I get a placebo?

> "The medical staff must ensure you are receiving the

Placebos are rarely used in cancer clinical trials. Giving a placebo is not ethical when an effective treatment is available. Placebos are usually only used when no standard treatment exists. They may also be used to compare a standard treatment plus an experimental treatment in one group with a standard treatment plus a placebo in another. Your study team will tell you if the study uses a placebo. Learn more about how clinical trials work.

> intervention outlined in the trial, and the goal is for you to complete the study. That's why I say that participating in a cancer trial provides platinum care."
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> —Desirée A. H. Walker, patient advocate and clinical trial participant

8. Will I be a guinea pig?

It's normal to worry about this. But it might help to know that new drugs undergo testing in labs and on animals to ensure they are safe for humans before reaching clinical trials. Phase 1 trials test experimental drugs in a small group of people to find a safe dose. People in these trials are closely monitored for unexpected side effects and adverse events. If any safety concern comes up, the trial will be stopped and examined to determine if it needs to be changed or should be closed. Learn more about safety and clinical trials.

9. Will care through a clinical trial be more expensive than standard care?

When you take part in a clinical trial, you may have costs that are not part of your usual care, such as travel to the study site and some doctor visits, labs, and imaging. However, these costs are sometimes covered by the study sponsor or support organizations. Be sure to discuss any potential costs with the study team before joining a study. Learn more about who pays for clinical trials.

10. Can people who don't speak English take part in clinical trials?

Language should not be a barrier to taking part in a clinical trial if you meet the eligibility requirements. Federal law requires hospitals and research centers that receive federal funds to offer access to language services, so be sure to ask for these services if needed.

11. Will I have to travel to take part in a study?

Taking part in a trial may require travel to the study site. Some trials help pay for travel and lodging or reduce the need for travel by conducting appointments and follow-ups via telehealth.

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