A Guide to Oncology Clinical Trials

What they are, risks and benefits, and information on joining a trial

Introduction

Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be a scary time for a person and their loved ones. The American Cancer Society estimates that about 2 million people are diagnosed each year.

There are many effective treatments for most types of cancer, such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. But, these treatments don't work well for everyone and can cause a range of side effects like nausea, fatigue, and weight loss. In some cases, current treatment options do not work at all.

Because of this, researchers do clinical trials to find better ways to treat people with cancer.

Cancer: A serious condition where the body is unable to control the growth of some cells, which can affect organ function and be life-threatening. Cancers can form within organs, soft tissue, bones, or blood.

Tumor: An abnormal growth of cells that can be either cancerous or non-cancerous.

What are Oncology Clinical Trials?

Oncology clinical trials are research studies that help scientists and doctors find new and safer ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer. If trials show that a new cancer treatment works and is safe, then it can be approved to be used by the people who need it.

Being in a trial is optional. You can stop at any time and for any reason. The trial staff will help you do this safely.

What Kind of Questions Do Researchers Want to Answer?

Researchers often ask the same questions to learn if a new treatment works and is safe for treating different types of cancer. For example, does the treatment:

- Help participants live longer? (**Overall Survival**)
- Help participants live longer without their cancer growing or spreading? (**Progression-Free Survival**)
- Help participants' cancer to disappear or shrink by a significant amount? (**Objective Response Rate**)
- Increase participants' **quality of life** more than standard treatment?

What Types of Treatments are Being Researched?

Researchers are looking at many types of cancer treatments that can be used either alone or in combination with standard treatment:

Targeted therapy focuses on specific proteins or molecules related to tumors. This approach aims to kill cancer cells with minimal or no damage to your healthy tissues.

Immunotherapy uses the body's own immune system to help attack cancer cells.

Hormone therapy works by changing the amount of hormones in the blood to slow down or stop cancer from spreading.

Several therapies in these categories are already available to patients.

What Happens in an Oncology Clinical Trial?

Clinical trials follow a certain set of procedures. Below, we cover what you might expect during each part.

Before starting the trial, you will likely go through a **screening** process to make sure that you do not have any serious medical issues that would make it unsafe to join or affect the way the treatment is designed to work. To do this, a doctor might take vital signs, blood or urine samples, and scans or samples of your cancer.

During the trial, you may be assigned to receive the trial treatment, the current standard treatment for your cancer, or both. Comparing these treatments helps researchers know if the trial treatment works. In some cases, doctors may recommend you stay in the trial and continue receiving the trial treatment as long as it is still helping you. This also means that doctors will continue testing your health during this time.

After the trial, you may be asked to do a **follow-up**. This may be a phone call or a visit to the trial site for more medical tests.

Federal laws and guidelines protect the safety and privacy of clinical trial participants. Clinical trials must be approved by an expert group called an institutional review board (IRB) that helps make sure the trial is fair, ethical, and as safe as possible.

What are some of the benefits and risks?

Possible benefits

- You may help researchers develop treatments for you or others who have cancer.
- You may have early access to advanced treatments for your condition.
- You may have access to treatment when no approved treatment exists.
- Your health will be watched by the trial doctors and nurses.

Possible risks

- The trial treatment may not help you.
- You may have side effects from the trial treatment.
- You may have frequent medical tests that are uncomfortable and have their own risks.

Other Ways to Get Involved

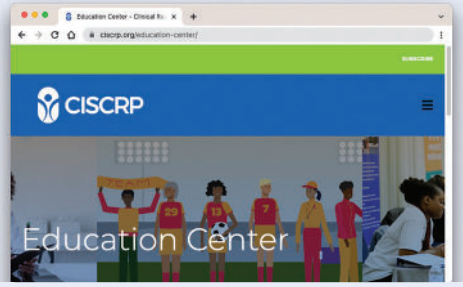
If participating in a trial isn't right for you, there are other ways to get involved:

- Participate in an observational study that only collects health data.
- Join an IRB or patient group to share your perspective with researchers.
- Become a patient author and write about your experience for a publication or other educational materials.

How Can I Find More Information?

- For information on how to find clinical trials, check out our "**How to Find A Clinical Trial**" brochure on our website at www.ciscrp.org/how-to-find-a-clinical-trial/.
- For a guide on clinical trial costs and payments, check out our "**A Guide to Costs and Payments**" brochure on our website at www.ciscrp.org/a-guide-to-costs-and-payments/.
- Check with local patient advocacy groups that might know of trials specific to your cancer type.

Visit www.ciscrp.org/education-center/ for more videos, brochures, frequently asked questions, and other information about clinical trials.



A panel of patients, professionals, and members of the public reviewed this educational brochure.

CISCRP is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to engaging the public and patients as partners in the clinical research process.

CISCRP does not recruit patients for clinical trials and does not conduct clinical research. CISCRP is also known as the Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation.

Visit www.CISCRP.org or call toll free 1-877-633-4376

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