

Is a cancer clinical trial right for me?

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Clinical trials, also known as clinical studies, help medical researchers understand how to diagnose, treat and prevent cancer and other diseases and conditions. Healthcare professionals translate findings from clinical trials into treatments that can lead to longer, healthier lives for people with cancer.

Clinical trials are an important option to consider if you're facing a [cancer diagnosis](#). Joining a clinical trial may provide experimental treatment options you may not otherwise have.

What is a clinical trial?

Research studies that involve people are called clinical trials. Researchers design cancer clinical trials to test new ways to find, diagnose, prevent and treat cancer and to manage cancer symptoms and the side effects of cancer treatment.

People who volunteer to participate in clinical trials help researchers test:

- New drugs or drug combinations.
- New medical procedures.
- New devices or surgical techniques.
- New ways to use existing treatments.
- Lifestyle and behavior changes.

For a new cancer treatment to become standard, it usually goes through two or three phases of a clinical trial. The early phases of cancer clinical trials are designed to study the safety of the new treatment. Later phases determine the effectiveness of the new treatment while continuing to study its safety.

Who should participate in clinical trials?

Clinical trials are an essential option for anyone who needs cancer treatment, but people of racial and ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in [medical research](#).

"That's a real concern and a real issue because you want to make sure that the results of the clinical trial are applicable to the whole population," says Gerardo Colon-Otero, M.D., a Mayo Clinic oncologist and medical director for the Mayo Clinic Center for Health Equity and Community Engagement Research.

To help promote health equity and reduce health disparities, [medical researchers](#) need people from [diverse communities](#) to participate in clinical trials. "It's critical that minorities participate in clinical research. Their participation helps us advance the field," says Lauren Cornell, M.D., a general internist with the Mayo Clinic Robert and Monica Jacoby Center for Breast Health.

Pooja Advani, M.B.B.S., M.D., a medical oncologist with the Center for Breast Health, agrees. "When people of all diverse backgrounds participate in clinical trials, we can be certain that promising [new drugs](#) being tested work in people of all backgrounds, and not just in Caucasian patients," she says.

Dr. Advani recommends that all people with cancer talk to their [health care professionals](#) about clinical trials. "I think it's important for patients to be considered for [clinical trials](#) no matter where they are in their cancer journey," she says.

How do you find a clinical trial?

Talk to your health care professional if you have been diagnosed with [cancer](#) and think a clinical trial might be right for you. Your care team members may know about a clinical trial that could be a good option for you. They may also be able to search for a trial for you or guide you in other ways.

If you decide to look for a clinical trial on your own, you may find these

steps helpful:

- Review the National Cancer Institute's "Steps to Find a Clinical Trial." This webpage offers a six-step guide to finding a clinical trial and explains [eligibility criteria](#), where to find trial lists, what to consider before contacting a trial team, how to contact the trial team, and what questions to ask.
- Join a national research volunteer registry. Health research changes people's lives daily, but many studies end early because there are not enough volunteers. Researchers need healthy people and those with all types of conditions to participate. Funded by the National Institutes of Health, ResearchMatch connects research volunteers with researchers nationwide. Sign up at [ResearchMatch.org](https://www.researchmatch.org).

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