

Clinical trials: A significant part of cancer care

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A cancer diagnosis is an emotional experience. Learning that you have cancer can create feelings of hopelessness, fear and sadness. This is especially true if your cancer is advanced or available treatments are

unable to stop or slow its growth.

"Often, when patients are diagnosed with cancer, they feel hopeless and scared. Clinical trials are one way patients can be proactive. They can make a choice in how their care is going to be," says Matthew Block, M.D., Ph.D., a Mayo Clinic medical oncologist.

Cancer [clinical trials](#) help physician-scientists test new and better ways to control and treat cancer. During a clinical trial, participants receive [specific interventions](#), and researchers determine if those interventions are safe and effective. Interventions studied in clinical trials might be new cancer drugs or new combinations of drugs, new medical procedures, new surgical techniques or devices, new ways to use existing treatments, and lifestyle or behavior changes.

Clinical trials provide access to potential treatments under investigation, giving options to people who otherwise may face limited choices.

"Clinical trials open the door to a new hope that maybe we can fight their cancer back and give them a better quality of life," says Geoffrey Johnson, M.D., Ph.D., a Mayo Clinic radiologist, nuclear medicine specialist and co-chair of the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center Experimental and Novel Therapeutics Disease Group.

You will receive [cancer treatment](#) if you participate in a clinical trial. "I think one common misperception about clinical trials is that if you enter a clinical trial, you may not get treatment (receive a placebo). And that's actually very much not true. Most clinical trials are looking at one treatment compared to another treatment," says Judy C. Boughey, M.D., a Mayo Clinic surgical oncologist, chair of Breast and Melanoma Surgical Oncology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and chair of the Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center Breast Cancer Disease Group.

Clinical trials are a significant part of cancer care at Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center. Cancer care teams work together across specialties to make sure the right clinical trials are available to serve the needs of people with cancer who come to Mayo Clinic.

"We are very particular in how we select the clinical trials that we have available for patients," says Dr. Boughey. "We want to have the best trials available for our patients. Some of the clinical trials are evaluating drugs—we are so excited about those drugs, but we can't prescribe those drugs for patients without having that trial. And so we will actually fight to try to get that trial open here to have it available as an opportunity for our patients."

If you choose to participate in a clinical trial, you will continue to receive cancer care. "For most patients that we evaluate, there's always the standard of care treatment option for those patients. And then, in many situations, there's also a clinical trial that the patient can participate in," says Dr. Boughey.

People who participate in clinical trials help make new and better cancer care available for future patients. The treatments available for cancer patients today exist because of the clinical trial participants of yesterday. "We couldn't advance medicine if it wasn't for people volunteering for trials. And the promise from our side is to say we're not going to put [patients](#) on trials or offer trials for them to consider unless we think there's a good chance that they'll get a benefit or that society at large will get a benefit," says Dr. Johnson.

Participating in a clinical trial may give you access to cutting-edge treatment, improve your quality of life and extend your time with loved ones.

"It's definitely worth reaching out to your health care provider and

asking, "What clinical trials could I be a potential candidate for?" says Dr. Boughey.

"And remember, you can ask this of your surgical oncologist, your [medical oncologist](#), your radiation oncologist, or any of the physicians you're seeing because there are trials in all disciplines. There are also ongoing trials that require the collection of tissue or the donation of blood. They can also be important in trying to help [future generations](#) as we continue to work to end cancer."

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