

What Are Clinical Trials?

Clinical trials are research studies that test how well new medical approaches work in people. In cancer, they test new ways to find, prevent, and treat cancer, and to improve quality of life. People join for many reasons, and past trials are a big reason people with cancer are living longer today.

The simple version

Clinical trials are research studies that test how well new medical approaches work in people. In cancer research, clinical trials test new ways to find, prevent, and treat cancer. They also help doctors improve the quality of life for people with cancer by testing ways to manage the side effects of cancer and its treatment.

In short: a clinical trial is a carefully run study that tests a new medical idea in people.

Why clinical trials matter

Today, people are living longer lives thanks to the results of past cancer clinical trials. When you take part in a clinical trial, you add to our knowledge about cancer and help improve cancer care for people in the future.

People join clinical trials for many reasons:

- People living with cancer often join because they want to help future patients.
- People with certain risk factors want to help doctors learn how to prevent cancer.
- Healthy volunteers want to help doctors learn how to find cancer early.

People with cancer and healthy volunteers join trials to play a role in cancer research and move science forward to help others.

The main types of trials

There are several types of cancer clinical trials. Each type is designed to answer different research questions.

- **Treatment trials.** Most cancer clinical trials are treatment studies that involve people who have cancer. These trials test new treatments or new ways of using existing treatments.
- **Prevention trials.** These look at ways to prevent cancer. In most prevention trials, the people who take part do not have cancer but are at high risk of developing it, or they have had cancer and are at high risk of a new cancer.

- **Screening trials.** The goal is to test ways to find cancer before it causes symptoms, when it may be easier to treat.
- **Supportive care / palliative care trials.** These look at ways to improve the quality of life of people with cancer, especially those who have side effects from cancer and its treatment.

In short: different kinds of trials answer different questions, from prevention to treatment to comfort and quality of life.

Learning more

If you are interested in clinical trials, your healthcare team can help you understand your options and where to look. Every trial is different, so it helps to ask questions and take your time.

Source: National Cancer Institute (cancer.gov/research/participate/clinical-trials/what-are-clinical-trials)

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