



Clinical trials for all of us

An introduction to research that changes lives

What are clinical trials?

Clinical trials are an essential part of advancing medical knowledge. They are the *only* method for introducing new treatments in the United States. Clinical trials are carefully designed to find out if treatments are safe, effective, and work better than existing treatment options—while maximizing benefits and minimizing risks.

Why do people participate in clinical trials?

Each person may have their own reasons for participating in a clinical trial, such as:

- Gaining access to a treatment not available to the public
- Receiving care that tracks their health continually
- Playing a more active role in their healthcare
- Helping future patients

Who participates in clinical trials?

When people from different backgrounds and communities take part in clinical trials, it can help ensure that new treatments work effectively for everyone affected by the condition being studied. We all benefit from clinical trials when they include:

- People of all colors, ages, genders, lifestyles, shapes, and sizes
- People from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds
- People living in different communities



For far too long, certain groups of people—whether due to age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or genetic background—have been underrepresented in clinical trials. This lack of representation can create challenges in our understanding of how diseases and treatments impact different populations. It may result in treatment outcomes that vary among different groups.

What can you do?

First, talk to your doctor or healthcare provider. Ask about available clinical trials and whether they might be a good fit for you. Learn about your treatment options and talk about them with family and friends. If you do qualify, you can help close the gap in clinical research, ensuring that new treatments are truly accessible to everyone.

How safe are clinical trials?

Many communities understandably mistrust clinical trials due to historical studies conducted without proper regulations. Because of historical disparities and unethical science, there have been key changes in federal regulations, starting with the National Research Act of 1974. Systems and regulations are now in place to ensure that all participants, no matter who they are or where they come from, are treated with dignity and respect. Patients are informed of risks and benefits before giving written consent to join a clinical trial. Updates to risks are shared during a trial and even after it ends. All patients who choose to volunteer in a trial have the ability to stop participating at any time.

Are all clinical trials the same?

There are many types of clinical trials, and each has different goals. For example:

- **Treatment** trials test new medicines or therapies.
- **Prevention** trials focus on finding ways to stop diseases before they even start.
- **Diagnostic** trials help doctors find better ways to detect diseases early.

In addition, clinical trials are done in 4 phases. During phases 1 through 3, the medicine is tested for safety, dose amount, and effectiveness. During phase 4, research continues even after the medicine has reached the market, for any additional findings over time.

What is a placebo?

Some treatment trials include a placebo, which is an inactive substance that looks like and is used in the same way as an active drug being tested. The effect of the active drug is compared to the effect of the placebo to determine the drug's effectiveness. Participants are informed of treatment regimens (including use of placebos) prior to participating in a trial.

Thank you for your interest in clinical trials!

Without clinical trials, we wouldn't have the treatments we rely on today, from cancer or cardiovascular therapies to vaccines for deadly diseases. If you participate in a clinical trial, you can help break down barriers, improve the quality of care for your community, and ensure that new medical treatments are safer and more effective for the populations who need them most, for generations to come. In some instances, a clinical trial might also be the best treatment option for you or a loved one. However, there are no guarantees of direct medical benefit in a clinical trial.

