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6 Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Clinical Trials

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Clinical trials are designed to test and evaluate innovative treatments and procedures for a wide range of medical conditions, and they can provide important treatment options for eligible people with cancer.

Here are some questions to ask to find out if a clinical trial might be right for you.

1.What could I get out of participating in a clinical trial?

Asking your care team about the potential benefits and risks of participating in a clinical trial is an important step in understanding your options. For instance, your care team might explain that a specific trial offers access to therapies with experimental potential that are not available as standard treatments. This can be important to consider as you plan the next steps in your care. Being part of a clinical trial also means potentially being part of an effort to advance medical science, which may or may not help you and other patients in the future.

2. What are the risks involved?

Your care team may warn you of risks associated with being in a clinical trial, such as potential side effects of the medicine or complications that may not be fully understood yet. They may also warn you that participating in a clinical study could mean more visits to the hospital for appointments, tests, or overnight stays. They may also tell you that participating in the trial could mean that you become ineligible for other trials or approved treatments in the future.

3. Is everyone on the clinical trial given the new treatment or procedure?

Many clinical trials place participants in two groups – one that receives the experimental new treatment and one that receives placebo. Patients in the placebo group don’t receive the new treatment or procedure, but they do receive the current standard of care at the minimum. If you’re concerned about the possibility of getting a placebo treatment, ask your care team about what exactly it would mean.

4. What are the criteria for taking part in a clinical trial?

Certain clinical trials may have requirements around age, sex, medical history, type, and stage of cancer –– so make sure to ask your care team if you qualify for the trial. For example, a younger person may respond differently to a treatment than an older person, so there may be age restrictions. Your care team can help you understand whether the trial is suitable for you.

5. What if I change my mind and want to leave the trial?

You can withdraw your consent to participate in any trial at any time. Asking your care team to explain the process for leaving a trial can help you feel more secure in knowing this option is available to you.

6. Will I have to pay to join the trial?

Many clinical trials are covered by the study's sponsor, but there may be out-of-pocket costs that you'll need to pay. Ask your care team about the financial cost of participating in the trial before you opt in so you can make the right financial decision and avoid any surprise bills down the road.

As always, consult with your care team for the guidance and recommendations that are best for you. Keep in mind that if you decide to take part in a clinical trial, your healthcare provider can help you identify which ones may be right for you, so make sure to bring it up early, write down any questions you have, and talk to your care team about the pros and cons of the trial.

If you're feeling overwhelmed or unsure about your treatment decisions, consider these Microsteps to help you reduce stress and feel more in control:

Not rushing into a decision.

Make sure to take your time and make a follow-up appointment if necessary to voice any concerns and ask any outstanding questions.

Taking five deep breaths.

Taking in large amounts of new information about your health can feel overwhelming. Deep breathing has been shown to reduce stress and bring you a sense of calm.

Writing down the pros and cons.

Seeing everything laid out can help you weigh your options more clearly and identify what's most important to you.

Talking to someone that you trust.

Consulting someone you feel comfortable with can help bring you a sense of comfort and alleviate some of your fears.

Seeking out a second opinion.

Talking to more than one expert, or even bringing the conversation up to a support group, can help you weigh your options and get the information you need before making an informed decision.

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