



CANCERcare®

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# Clinical Trials for Women with Ovarian Cancer

When discussing ovarian cancer treatment options with their oncologist, all patients are encouraged to ask about clinical trials. There are trials available for most types and stages of ovarian cancer, so there may be one that is right for you wherever you are in the course of your treatment. This fact sheet describes how clinical trials work, the benefits of participating, and how you can find out what trials are currently under way.



## “What are clinical trials?”

Clinical trials are studies that evaluate new treatments for people with cancer. Early-stage trials test treatments in small groups of people to find out if they are safe and what doses are most effective. Later stage trials compare new treatments to the standard of care. A new treatment may prove to be better than the existing treatment or not, or it may work equally as well but have different side effects.

The best time to talk with your doctor about clinical trials is before you start treatment. This is because patients who have received certain treatments may not be eligible for a particular trial. Clinical trials should also be discussed before starting any new treatment.

## Benefits of Participating

Clinical trials are one of the ways we make progress in treating cancer. By participating in clinical trials, you may receive benefit but more importantly, all clinical trial participants are performing a great service for future patients. Other possible benefits to clinical trial participants include having access to new treatments before they are widely available, and close monitoring by researchers, who need to know as much as possible about the treatment being studied. Any potential risks will be explained to you by the research team. Before you sign up for a trial, the researchers will make sure you fully understand everything that is involved in your participation. At any point, you can also withdraw from a clinical trial. Your treating team will then provide you with standard therapy.

## Ovarian Cancer Treatment: Latest Research

This is an important time in ovarian cancer research. Some new classes of drugs in clinical trials include:

**PARP inhibitors** These drugs block an enzyme cancer cells use to repair themselves when damaged. This may help make chemotherapy more effective. Examples of PARP inhibitors in clinical trials are olaparib, veliparib, and BSI-201.

**Angiogenesis inhibitors** These drugs prevent tumors from establishing the blood supplies that they need to survive. Bevacizumab is one such drug currently being tested in women with ovarian cancer.

**FR-targeted therapies** Some ovarian cancer cells have large numbers of folate receptors (a type of protein). Researchers are pairing drugs that target these receptors with chemotherapy, allowing them to deliver treatment directly to cancer cells. The drug farletuzumab is an FR-targeted therapy in clinical trials.

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## Disadvantages of Participating

Patients joining a clinical trial should consider how their enrollment may affect their quality of life. They will need to commit to following the study's requirements, and will also undergo careful monitoring of treatment side effects, which can mean more office visits and testing. Before participating in a clinical study, patients should be aware that they may be ineligible for future studies, depending on the treatments used. Also, the results of a trial using a new treatment may not be available for a long time and the specific study drugs that a patient received may not be disclosed to the patient or her doctor for months.

## “How can I find clinical trials for ovarian cancer?”

First, ask your oncologist, who is most familiar with you and may already know of an appropriate trial. You can also do research on your own and take the information you find back to your doctor. Here are some places to start:

- The National Cancer Institute maintains a database of all the cancer clinical trials in the United States that are currently recruiting participants ([www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials](http://www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials)). You can narrow your search by cancer type, location, keywords, and other criteria. You can also speak with one of their information specialists by calling 1-800-4-CANCER.
- The Foundation for Women's Cancers links to various clinical trials resources, including research programs at the Gynecology Oncology Group, National Comprehensive Cancer Network, and Tumor Vaccine Group. To learn more, visit [www.wcn.org/research/clinical\\_trials.html](http://www.wcn.org/research/clinical_trials.html).
- The Ovarian Cancer Research Fund and Ovarian Cancer National Alliance both have partnerships with Emerging Med to provide matches to ovarian cancer clinical trials. To learn more, visit [www.emergingmed.com/networks/ocrf/](http://www.emergingmed.com/networks/ocrf/) or [www.emergingmed.com/networks/ocna/](http://www.emergingmed.com/networks/ocna/)

## CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's oncology social workers provide free individual counseling and are available to help you with any emotional or practical concerns you have when considering a clinical trial, or for any issues related to coping with ovarian cancer and its treatment. We also offer support groups, education, and financial assistance. Call us at **800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org).

**Cancer vaccines** These treatments are designed to help the immune system better detect and eliminate cancer cells.

**“Individualized” therapy** New pathways that cancer cells use are being discovered, and drugs that block these pathways are being studied in ovarian cancer.



## Questions to Ask

When considering a clinical trial, don't hesitate to ask the research team any questions you have, such as:

- What is the purpose of this study?
- Who is sponsoring this research?
- What are the possible benefits and risks of the treatment that is being studied?
- How often will I need to come in for treatment or check-up appointments?
- What costs are covered, and which will I have to pay on my own?

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